FORMATIVE TYPES IN ENGLISH POETRY

BY

GEORGE HERBERT PALMER

The seven writers whom Professor Palmer has selected as marking most distinctly the epochs of English poetry are Chaucer, Spenser, George Herbert, Pope, Wordsworth, Tennyson, and Browning. In this book he studies both their contributions to the technique of verse and their influence as portrayers and moulders of their times. The result is not only a brilliant volume of literary criticism but a delightful series of essays as well.

FORMATIVE TYPES IN ENGLISH POETRY

By George Herbert Palmer

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FORMATIVE TYPES IN ENGLISH POETRY

THE EARL LECTURES
OF 1917

BY

GEORGE HERBERT PALMER

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PREFACE

The substance of this book was delivered as a series of lectures on the Earl Foundation before the Pacific Theological Seminary in Berkeley, California, during the spring of 1917. The subject was one which had long interested me. I had spoken on it before the Lowell Institute in Boston in 1913 and subsequently on several occasions had found for it eager auditors and critics among college students. This frequent traversing of the same ground has helped me to perceive more plainly the path to be followed and has controlled the inclination to turn to this side or that in search of better prospects.

My aim is a narrow one. The book is not a history of English poetry, not even an outline. At only half a dozen periods in the long and magnificent course of that poetry do I examine it, those periods being separated by intervals widely dissimilar and occupied by poets not always of the first rank. Some of the greatest names in our literature are not touched at all. The drama is omitted altogether; and I have

not inquired how far changes in prose writing attended those traced here in poetry. Even my seven chosen torch-bearers I have dealt with very imperfectly, turning to them only for the light they throw on the connected march of mind.

In my judgment the English understanding of poetry has unfolded itself slowly, passing through certain well-marked crises or epochs at each of which has stood a revolter from past practice who, setting up antagonistic, yet really supplemental, conceptions of poetry has thrown open tracts of emotion which our beautiful art had not previously touched. Of course minor changes of this sort occur continually. I have wished to fix attention on the half-dozen fundamental, logical and productive crises which have brought us the rich poetry we now possess and may yet bring us richer still.

There are dangers in such an undertaking. No important change comes about without long preparation, however great the genius who finally perceives its significance and gives it recognizable form. So condensed an account as mine is apt to make history appear a thing of leaps and bounds, as if settled practice suddenly gave way to novelty. But I have thought

this danger worth incurring if I could so bring out more clearly the type toward which many tendencies converged and present it embodied in him who first fully comprehended it.

I am sorry, too, that my plan obliges me to pass by many important writers whom one might naturally expect to find here. Where, for example, are Sidney and Shakspere with their sonnets, where Herrick, Marvell, Dryden, Gray, Byron, Keats, Shelley — superb poets all — preëminent, many readers will think, above several I have chosen? But they were not types. While all subsequent verse undoubtedly shows their influence, they did not establish a crisis and form a turning-point. More plausibly may it be objected that there is no such epochal separation between Tennyson and Browning as between the earlier members of my group. In justification I would plead that two great poets living so near us, and with whose writings we are so familiar, offer an exceptional opportunity for studying minutely and in less emphasized form the whole conception of a type.

For one huge omission, however, I have little excuse beside incompetence. Milton was too big for me. I reverence him beyond any other

inventor of harmonies and feel that without eyes he saw more deeply into beauty than any of our other poets have seen with them. But on that account I did not think I could expound him in any such space as was at my disposal. And, after all, was not Wordsworth right in thinking him solitary as a star? In a group he is out of scale. No doubt all the world was changed as soon as Milton wrote. But he left no school. Men opened their eyes and ears, wondered and were glad. But the wise ones went on their own way, and only the little ones imitated. He showed no path for others to follow. None but a Milton walks steadily there.

In dealing with individual poets my method is somewhat peculiar. I attempt to criticize from within out, not, as is more usual, from without in. That is, after gaining pretty full acquaintance with a poet I am apt to discover in him some central principle from which most of his peculiarities radiate. To seize this central type or interest and through it to give a unitary view of the man seems to me the true aim of criticism. One may easily press the method too far and thus regard complexity and discord too little. Few of us are completely

harmonized. Yet poets tend toward harmony about in proportion to their greatness, and in this book none but great men appear. I shall not distort them if I show each as moving from something like a single centre.

At the close of each of these lectures, as originally delivered, I read for half an hour from the poet discussed. Criticism, taken apart from that which is discussed, is arid and blinding stuff. I accordingly at first thought of printing after each lecture a selection of "illustrative material." But seeing that this would double the size of my book, and possibly render it less attractive to those who found there poetry already pretty familiar, I abandoned the plan and have substituted brief lists, sufficient, however, to enable the novice to bring my judgments to the test.

Perhaps a word of apology is needed for here venturing outside my province. My professional work has been in Philosophy. To the poets I have listened only as an amateur. Yet every one is wise, whatever his occupation, in cherishing some collateral interest which produces nothing for the market, is amenable to no social standard, and is valued simply for sweetening his own life. Such an unpaid in-

vigorator has poetry been to me during a long life. On nearing the close I am glad to give it publicity and commend it as a privy councillor to others.

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FORMATIVE TYPES IN ENGLISH POETRY

I

Introductory

FORMATIVE TYPES IN ENGLISH POETRY

I

INTRODUCTORY

WHAT is poetry? What its function? Where run the bounds which part it from other varieties of human expression? Why have certain special forms of rhythmic utterance been generally thought necessary for conveying emotional appeal? What value has that appeal? Why do many persons on reaching maturity persistently neglect poetry while others tumultuously acclaim it? Perhaps poetry, like human reason itself, is too deeply entwined with the roots of our being to be detached, inspected, and separately defined. Certainly critics equally competent have given widely different answers to the questions here proposed. I shall not attempt to settle their contentions. On the contrary, I am more anxious to stir my reader into thought, inconsistent thought, about these beautiful mysteries than to ease him with plausible solutions. Yet certain

dominant conceptions about the substance, form, and importance of poetry so shape the discussions of this book that it seems only fair to state them plainly in an introductory chapter and thus enable the reader as we proceed to reject or accept the evidence adduced.

Our first business will be a negative clearing of the ground. Certain misconceptions must be disposed of. So soon as we have determined what poetry is not, we shall be in better condition for understanding what it essentially is.

Poetry is commonly identified with verse and contrasted with prose. But on reflection few will persist in the error; for a large body of tolerable verse has no poetic quality. Nothing in its substance requires the verse form. For effecting any purpose it might as well have been written in prose. Verse however conveys to the ear a peculiar pleasure; and when there is nothing else to be conveyed, the writer who drops that drops all. Verse, therefore, always giving us something agreeable, is peculiarly tempted into emptiness and needs for its justification only occasionally to deviate into sense. To maintain that a succession of sweet sounds makes poetry is much like finding prose in a dozen words taken at random from the dic-

tionary. Even if we regard rhythm and metre as equally essential to poetry, as words are to prose, they are essential merely to its structure and not to its substance.

How far that substance can be detached from its usual outward form is an unsettled question. The great experimenters of the past — the translators of the Psalms, Nicholas Breton in his "Fantastickes," Milton in "Samson Agonistes" and in passages of his prose works, Traherne in his joyous outpourings, Jeremy Taylor in his sermons, Ossian in heroic song, Blake in mystic vision, Carlyle and Ruskin in social denunciation or æsthetic rhapsody, Whitman in democratic chant — have gone far, but not far enough to satisfy the rebellious poets of to-day. These would abolish metre altogether, cut their lines with scissors, and give us so little of rhythm as to be audible to few beside themselves. Personally I would not assert that poetry must perish under such conditions. I have seen instances of its survival where the wrench has been severe. I merely say that poetry able to withstand such dislocation will call for a twofold emotional power. The poet has cast away aids which centuries have experimented to fashion. Un-

supported by these, to hold his poetry upright will require a stalwart arm. But the mere attempts, clumsy as they usually are, testify to the sound feeling that poetry is larger than verse and should not be confused with it.

A second misconception, and one into which both individuals and nations in their early years are certain to fall, is that poetry is merely an impressive means for reporting some incident, character, story, or wise thought. In reality the description of what is seen, the telling an interesting tale, the statement of a valued truth, in short any mere reproduction of fact is something quite apart from the business of poetry. Yet great poets have made this mistake, and many readers look for nothing else. Early English history was repeatedly written in rhymed "fourteeners," and no doubt history was easier to remember in this form. Drayton in his "Polyolbion" wrote a complete geographic account of England in verse. Sir John Davies versified human psychology in his "Nosce Teipsum"; and Phineas Fletcher, in his "Purple Island," human physiology. What has all this to do with poetry, we may well ask. Dryden composed his "Religio Laici" to demonstrate the iniquity

of the Catholic Church. And when in later life he himself became a Catholic, he wrote "The Hind and the Panther" to prove the errors of the English Church and the certainty of Catholic doctrine. But how unimportant for poetry are such matters of observation, description, and argument! I might be a Catholic or Protestant and still find much to admire in both of Dryden's poems; for the poetry would lie elsewhere than in the doctrine. And in the same way, though I cared nothing for Drayton's geography or Davies' psychology, I could not fail on every few pages of their books to come upon glorious poetic passages which are in marked contrast with their prosaic surroundings. In each case what constitutes the main theme is not poetry at all and might be expressed more neatly in prose. Whatever poetry is there is independent of that theme. No, we may altogether rule out from the field of poetry matters of fact, or at least may count them collateral and subordinate, a mere framework for the display of costly material. The child's fancy that when he is entertained by a good story, jinglingly told, he is enjoying poetry, must be abandoned. It is no exaggeration to say that poetry is not concerned with facts.

We test its worth by asking if it is beautiful or ugly, not if it is true or false.

There remains the gravest of all misconceptions. We are apt to think of poetry as serving some useful end, aiming in some way to make its readers better. We Americans are peculiarly liable to this error, so slender is our æsthetic sense, so swollen our practical. We are always asking what a thing is for. But poetry is not for anything except itself. It seeks to produce beauty and counts beauty its own excuse for being. Its quality should be judged independently of whatever moral principles or practical measures may chance to profit by it. About a third of Whittier's writings are devoted to the denunciation of slavery, and they have perished with that which they chivalrously attacked. Mrs. Browning wrote page after page in advocacy of an alliance between France and Italy, and we do not read those pages now. Kipling has employed poetry to eulogize Tory imperialism; but since much of it is good poetry, the liberal enjoys it no less than the conservative. To take a case from America: our enjoyment of William Vaughn Moody's "Ode in Time of Hesitation" should not depend on our view of this country's duty

to the Philippines. Poetry is not dogmatic, nor need our poets be preachers with a message. We do not ask if a symphony by Beethoven is true or of good moral tendency. Enough that it is beautiful.

So much for what poetry is not. Its province is distinct from that of observation or conduct. And from how large a part of human interest is it thus excluded! Our chief business in life is to become acquainted with facts and to learn to separate the false from the true. Most of the remainder is covered by conduct, those practical activities where we discriminate right from wrong. What remains then for the poet after he has cast away the cognitive intellect and the directing will? Beyond these lies the field of emotion, all that part of individual experience which is not concerned with ascertaining truth or achieving ends. The feelings, the varying moods of the poet, are what he writes about. Strictly speaking, poetry has but a single subject, the mind of the poet. We readers are interested in accompanying that mind and in adding its emotions to our own. We might, then, offer a preliminary definition of poetry, considered from the poet's point of view, and call it the conscious transmission of

an emotional experience to another imaginative mind.

A striking bit of evidence that the real ground of poetry does thus lie within the poet himself, rather than in the facts which purport to be his subject, is furnished by a group of poems whose professed aim is objective delineation. Shakspere's "Sonnets," Spenser's "Astrophil," Milton's "Lycidas," Shelley's "Adonais," Tennyson's "In Memoriam," Arnold's "Thyrsis," Woodberry's "North Shore Watch," form a majestic series of laments for a friend whose memory they would snatch from oblivion. Yet while they give a pungent sense of the grief of the mourner, in all alike he who is mourned is but thinly painted. What the facts of his life were, his intellectual interests, the detailed traits of his character, or even what was his outward appearance we do not learn. He in whose honor the poem was written remains a shadow, while our interest in him who has suffered the loss is deep and poignant.

The transmission of a mood, however, is no simple matter. Three difficulties attend it: vagueness of the original mood, entanglement with other mental factors, and imperfect mas-

tery of the means of transmission. The poet's rank is fixed by the way in which he meets these obstacles. The most serious of them is the first. Adverse or favorable circumstances excite feeling in us all, but the feeling is usually vague. Many of us can hardly distinguish the emotional coloring of one hour from another. We pass our time largely in routine, and only occasionally does an incident induce a mood so vivacious and solid as to hold our attention for more than a brief space. Now, good poetry is the expression of high emotion. Whether prompted by direct experience or by sympathetic imagination, the feeling must be abundant, fresh, piercing, clearly outlined, if it will move the imagination of a reader. In it there should be stock enough for the poet to develop, hold enough on the world of fact to render it credible, and dignity enough in its theme to win enduring approval. Most of us, however, experience no such weighty emotions. To the men of genius we turn to obtain them. Nine tenths of ordinary verse shows little emotional experience. Its writers cannot make poetry because they have nothing to make it of.

Or may the seeming deficiency be partly due to a different cause? Feeling does not present

itself alone, but in company with observation, reflection, purpose, and effort, by all which it is blurred. Yet while the ingredients of a mental state cannot be altogether parted, they can be so discriminated that attention becomes fixed on some of a certain kind to the comparative neglect of others. This sorting is the poet's work. He throws into the foreground those emotional elements which in the experience of the common man are overlaid by practical affairs. In daily life judgments of fact and of right cannot be passed by without seriously stopping the current of feeling. Perhaps these poets do not so much impart what they alone possess as reveal to us what we too already blindly have. Their report, accordingly, we recognize as veracious and familiar, and are grateful to them for revealing our hidden wealth. Without their aid we could not have detached it from its context.

Or if some piercing experience has thrown into exceptional prominence a certain phase of feeling, how small is the chance that we can deliver it unabated to another person! As well expect an ordinary man to paint a landscape merely because its beauty is daily spread before his chamber window. Receiving emotion and

expressing it are not the same thing. The latter requires a special aptitude, inventiveness, practice, readiness to comprehend another's mind, ability to keep feeling fresh under inspection, and a gradual mastery of those artistic agencies which time has proved to have the power of appeal.

Accordingly I have felt obliged to clog my definition of poetry with an adjective and call it the *conscious* transmission of feeling to a thoughtful mind. If, for example, I have been struck with some sudden joy or stabbed with sudden pain, and an exclamation is forced from me which well expresses what I feel, I am not thereby proved a poet. Something more than an instinctive cry is needed for that. There must be a purpose of communication, a definite plan of attack on another's mind. Poetry is no casual and spontaneous affair. It involves criticism and control. Wordsworth rightly warns us that, unlike feeling felt, poetry is feeling recalled in moments of tranquillity. And how difficult is such recall. The poet is to envisage a mood already past, to hold it firm, precise, and vivid, and then devise means for conveying it entire to the mind of another. Of course a certain coöperation is assumed.

The reader must be capable of receiving. He should be willing to drop for the moment his own conditions and take on those of a different person.

To do its work then poetry requires a shaping intelligence besides its emotional matter. Unorganized, the mood of feeling we seek to convey has little appealing power. Originally bound up with diverse experiences, together constituting a life, when detached for report it is fragmentary, and appearing — so to speak — with ragged edges, is unimpressive. A landscape casually seen is far from being a work of art. It contains irrelevant details, while much that is needed for understanding is absent. An artistic object is one that is complete within itself. Unlike nature, it shows no lack or superfluity. Its clear beginning, middle, and end give it coherent form. That is what we mean by beauty. Self-sufficient, the piece stands as if it had always been so, as if indeed the artist had imparted only what already belonged to it. Accordingly the universal demands of artistic form may be summarized thus: every piece of fine art must possess an inner structure adapted to its theme; must contain within its own compass whatever is necessary for its

comprehension; all its contents must harmoniously reinforce the dominant note; whatever does not, through being superfluous, accidental or jarring, must be eliminated; and the process of accomplishing all this must not attract attention. Good art attains an ease which seems inevitable.

Yet while all the arts require form, or structural unity, each has its own technique, or set of tested agencies for conveying emotion of its particular kind. Poetry is primarily an art of sounds, though unlike music, its nearest of kin, it addresses the understanding no less than the ear. In great poetry sound and sense so coöperate that a good ear as readily recognizes an excellent poem by the sequence of its syllables as a good intellect does by the weight and coherence of its thought. A person possessed by a passionate and significant mood, if unable to translate it into beautiful sound, may win attention in prose but lacks something of being a poet.

Furthermore, the sound, even if beautiful, must be suited to the sense. Rightly we speak of a tone of feeling; for certain tones convey certain moods, regardless of what is said. Tones are the only language of the brutes. Like

them, we too receive emotional impulse from pitch, stress, duration, swiftness, repetition, pause; only that possessing articulation, which brutes do not, we are able to get greater precision in our emotions through suggestive groupings of vowels and consonants. These the poet harmoniously adjusts. Instinctively or consciously he perceives what sounds are no mere means for reporting emotions. They have worth of their own and are of the very stock and substance of the poetry.

In naming just now the possible modulations of sound, I included pitch. By it most of the effects of music are obtained. In poetry it plays but a small part, and herein lies a fundamental difference of the two arts. Though not altogether absent from verse, it enters into it only in the same way as it enters prose, as a means by which a reader's voice avoids monotony. But verse has not, like music, a notation for indicating pitch. Its chief reliance is on time and stress, Southern nations attaching greater consequence to time, Northern to stress. So extreme is the insistence on stress in English that the length or shortness of syllables is largely determined by their degree of emphasis. Among the Greeks and Romans it

was not so. Accent was subordinated, syllables being rated by the time spent in pronouncing them. Since these ancient writers were the first to analyze poetry and to fix its nomenclature, their terms have descended to us, and it is usual to call a weighty syllable long, a light one short. I shall not quarrel with the usage, as many poetic reformers do to-day. Abrupt breaks with the past do not attract me. Greek prosody has a neatness lacking in most of the systems invented since, and will not expose us to error if we remember that an unaccented syllable usually requires less time in utterance than an accented. Until English speakers distinguish more sharply between the length and stress of sounds we shall not fall into error if we somewhat broaden the meaning of our inherited metrical terms.

A few of these terms I will here explain, so that hereafter I may use them intelligibly when pointing out the metrical habits of the poets studied. The presumption with which all poetry starts is that between feeling and rhythm there is an inherent bond. What the nature of this is may be gathered from the fact that feeling does not, like argument or narrative, advance in a straight line. It broods,

recurs, hovers over. The emotion is returned to again and again. Repetition, accordingly, is a mighty engine in all the Fine Arts. In those where feeling is most dominant, as in music and poetry, it is perpetually present. Yet it cannot be felt till linked with variety. The sound of a clock soothes us best when we attribute a little greater loudness to its alternate ticks. We differentiate our heart-beats. Whenever successive sounds occur we construct a rhythmic unit, which we then take pleasure in repeating indefinitely. Music has such a primary unit, the bar, where the duration of sound is fixed, but the pitch and continuity vary. Repetitions of the bar give a larger unit, the phrase.

In close analogy to the musical bar stands the primary element of poetry, the foot, composed of several syllables, each having a prescribed length or stress. The favorite foot in English is the so-called Iambus, a short syllable followed by a long. The reverse of this, a long syllable followed by a short, is the Trochee. Two long syllables, the Spondee, though impossible in successive feet, may sometimes be introduced singly into a line to give it weight. Feet of three syllables, common in the poetry of

the last century and a half, have always entered into folk-song, but our early poets of standing avoid them. They are of two sorts: the Dactyl, a long syllable followed by two short, and the Anapæst, two short followed by a long. But enough of definition. These four or five feet will be sufficient for our purpose. In order to fix them in mind I give a familiar example of each:

The cūr | few tōlls | the knēll | of pār | ting dāy
Tēll me | nōt in | mōurnful | nūmbers
I am mōn|arch of āll | I survēy
Hālf a league, | hālf a league, | hālf a league | ōnward.

How many feet shall a line contain? As many as suit the phase of feeling described. Fitting the measure to the mood requires poetic skill. Our ancestors in their rhymed chronicles were fond of fourteen syllables, seven iambics. Tennyson builds "Locksley Hall" with eight trochees. But lines so long are too much for a single breath. In reading, most persons will divide them, making two out of each. Even shorter lines become easier for the breath and the understanding if a slight pause is introduced near the middle, called a cut or cæsura. A rhyming word at the end of a line will emphasize its finished unity while

marking its companionship with some other line or lines. Thus arises a new unit, the stanza. A group of stanzas of similar length, and all developing a single theme, will then complete the metric structure of the poem.

Among the minor technicalities alliteration and assonance may be mentioned, the former employed to give greater impressiveness to certain words by rhyming their initial consonants; the latter, where vowels of a like kind distribute a common tone of feeling throughout an entire passage. But these are dangerous expedients. If noticed, they defeat their end by withdrawing attention from the feeling and fixing it on trivial details. When Tennyson tells us how in a certain courtyard

> "The golden gorge of dragons spouted forth
> A flood of fountain foam,"

we are likely to forget the fountain in our wonderment at the feat of Tennyson. Delicacy, too, is needed in stopping a line at its end or sending it on to find its pause somewhere in the following line. Different effects accompany each, and either may be excessive.

In this detailed anatomy of verse — stress, foot, line, stanza, cæsura, end-stopping, vowel-color, alliteration — I would not be under-

stood as accounting for the charm of poetry. Much of that must always, outside these technicalities, remain mysterious, a result of the untraceable genius of the individual poet. We shall enjoy him more if we know what his poetic resources are and something about his underlying processes. But these should not be taken as fixed rules, to be universally observed. The Fine Arts lose their meaning when they cease to be free. Their laws are not made to be kept, but to be deviated from, to be circled around. If, for example, a poet has no central type of verse in mind, art ceases and his poem sprawls. While if his conformity to type is too exact, we remain unmoved, as before any other piece of mechanism. No Indian weaver begins his rug without having in mind an orderly pattern for its little figures; but never are those figures repeated precisely. Blank verse follows a common type in Wordsworth and Browning, but the product is as different as the two men. Counting the fingers will never show how a fine poem is built. Beauty is to be had only when an orderly form bears the modifying impress of a living personality.

Having thus said the little that is possible about the substance, form, and technique of

poetry, it only remains to indicate its importance. For the writer its importance is obvious. Expression eases inner tension. A painful feeling loses something of its pain when it ceases to be exclusively one's own, receives outward form, and becomes a thing of beauty; while a joyful experience clamors for utterance and when spoken seems doubly secure. We all find pleasure in expressing ourselves, and that highest form of expression which leaves behind it a beautiful, lasting and shareable result brings dignity to him who employs it. But where lies the value to the community of such transmission of feeling to a thoughtful reader? What contribution can poetry make toward invigorating human life?

The first and most considerable comes from its work in training the imagination. Poetry offers us our best opportunity for entering into experiences not our own. It thus corrects our tendency to become shut up within our separate selves. People differ widely in understanding the life of others. Some, of imagination all compact, know instinctively the moods of those whom they approach. Others seem incapable of comprehending any other minds than their own. And how petty, tactless, iso-

lated, and poverty-stricken are such lives! We are social beings. Each life naturally interlocked with that of others, suffers depression when detached. Swift mutual understanding brings pleasure and efficiency. Because poetry can train us in a habit of mind so generous, it has high social value.

Yet in this matter there is a marked contrast between the use of poetry by the young and the mature. Youth has its private moods, states of feeling which it does not understand and of which it is half ashamed. Then, to its surprise and delight, it finds that the poets have had the same experiences. In them, the things at which the youth or maiden blushed appear glorious. Young people thus gain importance in their own eyes, poetry expressing them better than they can express themselves. This I call the sentimental use of poetry, and it is something not altogether to be despised. For a time it assists growth. Looking into the mirror of humanity, one sees one's own face there and knows himself a person of worth. But such sentimentality cannot long continue. It is childish and enfeebling, a mere means of shutting ourselves more securely within our own little cabin. Before they are twenty, most

sensible men discard poetry altogether, while a few devote themselves to it with a new seriousness, having discovered its imaginative value. Like all fine art, it then becomes a means of escape from one's own limitations. Through it we are able to comprehend subtly moods that never were ours and so to live many lives instead of our little one. When I travel, I do not seek the places that are like my home. I go abroad for broadening, and consequently turn to scenes with a character of their own, scenes strange and refreshing. Not that I prefer them to mine. On the contrary, I usually return to my habitual surroundings with new respect and a clearer understanding. But by the study of human differences I have gained flexibility, discernment, and sympathy. Now, poetry, when rightly taken, is a species of fireside travel. It can remove us from the habitual round more swiftly than train or steamer. The greater the poet, too, the better will he do this, bringing as he does a wealth of experience. Under his discipline, how much better lawyer I become, how much better physician, how much better merchant, how much better anything, because I have broken the bondage that binds us all — the bondage to self. Taken imagina-

tively, poetry is a great liberator. Those who go through life without its aid, repelled by its sentimental use, work with stunted powers.

Liberating us from ourselves then, poetry becomes also our best means of acquaintance with the spiritual ideals of our race. At the beginning of this chapter I said that poetry records feelings rather than facts or ideals. But the saying may easily be misunderstood. After all, in order to feel one must feel about something. One does not feel *in vacuo*. Poetry reflects what has moved men most. Feeling, willing, and knowing are not detachable functions. In some degree all enter into every mental state. We may approach experience as the observer does, to note its facts; as the moralist does, to urge the best treatment of the facts; or as the poet does, to picture how his particular mind is affected by those facts. These are merely three modes of dealing with the same matter. Each emphasizes a single aspect of life, and to doing its own work each should be true. Poetry should not turn aside from its individual experience in order to increase knowledge or to stimulate socially useful acts. Such alien aims may dull the picture. But feelings

that are large and significant spring from large and significant things. In poetry we read what has impressed men as most significant. Here as in a gallery we see the multifold personal reactions of joy, sorrow, aspiration, disappointment, revolt, triumph, religion, which contact with this puzzling world of nature and man induces. The history of poetry is a history of the ideals which men have counted valuable, a truthful history, too, because it shows these ideals not as offered to other persons, but as affecting the mind of the poet himself. A book like the present, which exhibits the gradual unfolding of a nation's mind through successive conceptions of poetry, is a chapter in the history of that nation's civilization.

When prosaic Audrey asks Touchstone if poetry is a true thing, we may confidently answer that after its kind it is. It brings us face to face with reality. More than any other species of writing it sets down how a given individual has been affected by nature, regardless of whatever may have come to some one else. On faithfulness in this psychologic truth its success is staked. For the historic truth of how things happened, or even for scientific truths, seen in laws and the general principles

sought by scholars, it cares little. Only supposing things did happen so and so, according to such and such laws, there must be no error in stating the feelings experienced. I have sometimes thought the two kinds of truth might be illustrated by two consecutive stanzas of "The Eve of St. Agnes." In the first Keats tells how the moon, shining through the stained window of Madeline's chamber, "threw warm gules on Madeline's fair breast." It is said that moonlight will not transmit colors. I have never inquired into the fact. It does not affect the poetry. But when in the next stanza it is narrated how in the maiden's undressing

> "Of all her wreathed pearls her hair she frees,
> Unclasps her warmed jewels one by one,
> Loosens her fragrant bodice; by degrees
> Her rich attire creeps rustling to her knees;
> Half hidden like a mermaid in sea-weed
> Pensive awhile she dreams awake,"

I suspect a psychologic, that is, a poetic, error. Keats has previously described the room as intensely cold. Did he keep that feeling in mind when he allowed Madeline to linger naked, meditating over her fantastic dream? Human nature does not work in that way.

Great poet that Keats is, he seldom slips. In his "Belle Dame Sans Merci" he tells how he "met a lady in the meads." Perhaps he did, perhaps not. No matter. But of what terrible veracity is his picture of blind longing, mad pursuit, empty attainment, and a disappointment which strips the world of beauty! Here poetry "is a true thing." Just so Shelley's "Sky-Lark" sings more truthfully than did ever feathered bird.

And because of this psychological veracity poetry is necessary for us all. It repairs the wastes of time. Custom lays on most of us a heavy hand, removing the background of reality from our words and thoughts and leaving them as mere signs for the guidance of conduct. We get used to things, and how dull things then become! Glibly we speak of the dazzling beauty of a flower; but how much do we ever have in mind of what Herbert saw when he wrote,

> "O rose, whose hue angrie and brave
> Bids the rash gazer wipe his eye"?

The genuine poet never grows used to anything. He starts with an individual thrilling experience and restores for his readers the freshness of their early days. Childhood's wonder-

ment returns, and over the marvels all around us we glow anew. Rightly are poets called seers. He who rejects their illuminating aid moves stupidly through life with half-closed eyes.

II

Geoffrey Chaucer

II

GEOFFREY CHAUCER

It might well seem presumptuous for a person with any pretensions to scholarship to undertake to set forth in a single brief chapter one of the most voluminous poets of our language. In Skeat's edition Chaucer's works fill nearly two thousand large octavo pages. But I make no pretension to literary scholarship and in this field am but an amateur. To be a scholar in Chaucer demands the devotion of half a lifetime, so many questions relating to him are still in controversy. What ones among the many pieces bearing his name were written by him? What ones merely composed under his influence? From what sources does he derive his material? For this creative genius, like Shakspere, seldom invents what he can borrow. Then too what are the precise facts of his life? Plentiful rumors about him have floated down from antiquity; but are these rumors trustworthy? What evidence is there for them, and do they harmonize with other known facts? It is a vast affair, becoming

acquainted with Chaucer. But shall we delay our enjoyment till all these puzzling questions are settled? If we had picked a volume of Chaucer out of an ash barrel, and never had heard his name, should we not see at once the quality of the writing and know that its author must have had a prodigious influence over his contemporaries and successors? It is this æsthetic interest in Chaucer — an interest open even to one who lacks special historic training — which I would emphasize. I wish my readers to look upon his work as the best example we have of an important type of poetry, one of the earliest types and he the first to present it adequately. All else in the great world of Chaucer I pass by. Whatever facts about him I borrow from the accredited authorities will have sole reference to this aim. As an account of Chaucer this chapter will be meagre indeed. For illustrating a certain formative type of delightful poetry, it may be sufficient.

But the word "type" is obscure, almost mysterious. It needs definition. If we are to find "formative types" in English poetry, we should know precisely what to look for. Here then, in connection with our first poet I will try to make the matter plain. In my first

chapter I pointed out that poetry does not primarily seek to inform: it is not a statement of facts or of ethical precepts. It aims at the conscious transference of a mood. Accordingly, in estimating the beauty of a poem our chief question is how completely is that mood presented? Is it vivid, rounded, fully organized? Has everything been stated which belongs to it, which would enable it to affect us as it affected the poet himself? And then, of course, the universal demand of art — is it severe; has everything been cut away which could possibly be spared?

The significance of a mood, however, varies according as it is a profound and permanent or a transient one. We all have our temporary moods, and not infrequently pungent ones. Something makes us taste of life more deeply than is our wont, and our dull tongues are quickened. We try to set forth our emotion for others to share. Under an urgent experience an ordinary man may become temporarily a poet. The very forms of verse bring a relief to his mood. Such persons who rise to the height of a single poem, or a few poems, we may call poetic writers, in contrast to the true poets. And of course many a one sinks below

this level. He has some vague feeling which he imperfectly comprehends and can only imperfectly state; yet having a certain knack of verse he writes with neatness and we loosely speak of what he produces as "poetry." How can we distinguish this from the true stuff? From the point of view of the writer I have called poetry the conscious transference of a mood. From that of the reader it is a fragment of reality seen through a temperament. The poetic writer has no temperament; the poet has.

To get an understanding of what we mean by a temperament we had better go quite outside the realm of poetry and examine certain experiences of common life. Suppose on a street-corner of a busy city a group of men stand watching the moving crowd in the street. Their eyes turned in the same direction, do they all see the same things? The majority of them perhaps do. If we could penetrate their inner minds we should probably find little difference in the perceptions of four fifths of the onlookers. Their observation is superficial. What is seen stirs no one of them deeply. Each casts a glance, sees a moving object, recognizes it as a human being, and that is about all. But in the group are three persons of a different

type. One is an artist who, as he gazes on the swaying street, is struck with the multitude of moving arms and legs, with great dark spots of body, with certain illuminated masses here balancing other illuminated masses there. Among the swift motions certain show a harmonious rhythm, but there are maladjustments too, and he is studying how these might be pulled together to form an integral whole. That is what the artist sees. At his elbow stands a statesman, concerned over the well-being of his townsmen. He has before him what we are accustomed to call the same crowd as the artist, but yet how different! For as he turns his face upon that struggling crowd he is asking how many of these people are well-to-do, how many in poverty, what proportion do the criminally inclined bear to the good citizens, have any sunk so low in the social scale that there is no more hope for them — such are the statesman's questions. And since such questions fill his mind, such are his observations. If his artist neighbor should say to him, "Did you see that splendid splash of color up there on the left?" would he not answer, "No, I only saw a wretchedly ragged woman, hiding her head in her shawl." This the artist had not

seen, for he had been looking for something else. But near these two moves a man of God. Looking into the wan faces, he asks himself how many are lovers of the ways of righteousness, how many have grown careless and fallen into vice, how many have lost their self-respect and can no longer think of duty as a friend? Though the statesman and he are scanning the same faces, each receives a different shade of impression.

And just these special prepossessions of sight will be carried away when the three friends move from the sidewalk and go up into the less frequented parts of the town. Whatever they see will come to them colored by their temperament, that is, their habitual mode of regard. These men have encompassed themselves with limitations of vision which, while allowing much that is of value to escape, enable them to perceive more fully the value of what they do see. Each of these temperamental persons is so inwardly fashioned that only certain sides of the world can come at him. And with this state of things each is on the whole content. His work is thus defined. He knows what he is called to do. And so far from despising such a one, we should honor him for accepting so lim-

ited a section of life. Only so can he acquire an aptitude of sight and judgment, and become able to disclose the deeper things of the world to his fellows.

Now, what is obvious here in common life is no less true in poetry. The great poets are those who have a temperament, a permanent attitude of mind, who have habituated themselves to approach all things on certain single sides and are contented with their limitations. Their moods are not thin and shifting. A temperamental type stamps all their work. How idle then for us when we would read poetry to bring with us a standard of what all poets should be; and because on opening a volume we do not find this there, to close it again thinking it has no value for us, we don't like it! "Like" or "don't like," that is the test ordinarily applied; and nothing more surely hinders growth. We bring our prepossessions, our little fragmentary temperaments and expect the great man to have no other. We go to the poets with the demand that they reflect ourselves. If they do, we give them the supreme honor of liking them; if they do not, we decline the labor of understanding. Such is the sentimental way of reading poetry, and it should be

dropped in our teens if we would not grow up weaklings.

But if we desire to enlarge our imagination and increase the scope of our life, we cannot do better than to turn to the great poets precisely because they are of a different type from ourselves. Let them take us in charge and instruct us how the world looks from their point of view. It is the poet's work to emancipate us from ourselves. Other men are able to do it but partially. The poets do it veraciously. For the moment they can make their life ours, if we will put ourselves under their guidance and not insist on all doing the same thing.

In some such way English poetry will be studied in this book. Regarding each of these poets as but a medium for bringing about the enlargement of the English mind, I give no detailed account of a poet's life and writings. I seek to furnish insight, not information. Such facts as can be had from a biographical dictionary I omit, or use only so far as they help to determine the type of the poet. I want to lay bare his psychology and to show how naturally connected with this are the peculiarities of his writings. What is his attitude of mind? What aspects of the world is he interested in

setting forth? That is all. If I can conduct my readers to the point of view from which they can comprehend what each poet has to say, I shall count it of little consequence that they do not like what he says. Has he said it well, I ask, and felt it deeply? If so, let us be grateful. Every phase of human nature, truly displayed, has value and enriches us all. Let us then be flexible-minded and, putting ourselves successively in charge of these men, let us endeavor to see the world as each of them saw it.

But while varieties of individual temperament create a multitude of interesting types, these are not all of equal consequence. The differences among them are often small. But from time to time, and usually when old ways of poetizing are outworn, some genius appears whose temperament is of so divergent, fresh and pronounced a type that it becomes formative over his successors. Some new phase of human experience, or at least a new mode of handling it, is disclosed by him, and those who come after are enabled to see and do what without him they could not have seen and done. It is these truly formative types which interest me. A small number of those which have been most influential I here examine.

When English poetry first sets out — I do not meddle with the Saxon and Norman forms which preceded — but when that which may fairly be called English poetry first sets out, we meet a mighty figure, Geoffrey Chaucer, 1340–1400 — easy dates to remember. His work is in an elementary type of poetry, but one which needed to be developed before others could arise at all. That type we must keep steadily in mind if we would enjoy him, for from it most of his excellence is derived. It is narrative poetry, vivid description, rooted in the observation of facts. Chaucer looks out upon the world, enjoys it, and attempts to reproduce it for our pleasure. His poetry reflects hearty content with the world as it stands. Such mere reproduction of welcomed experience must underlie all other varieties of verse. Of it Chaucer is the acknowledged master.

The closer we come to Chaucer, the more remarkable it seems that he was able to do work of this naturalistic sort. The conventional obstacles which he inherited were enormous. Under the magnitude of them a lesser genius would have succumbed. For a vast store of theology was handed over to him which

had been accumulated reverently through centuries, though only half understood either by those who read or wrote it. An ecclesiasticism too protected by the State, sternly prescribed what men should believe and read, repressing individual inquiry. At this time it was rendered freshly suspicious by Wiclif and his followers. Verbose moralizing was also in fashion, platitudes were accepted as profundities, and to their length, tedium, and emptiness, no one seems to have objected. Everybody too delighted in fantastic allegory, the very opposite of observational truth. And if we are to complete the catalogue of Chaucer's adverse conditions, we must mention the fondness of his age for the inferior writers of antiquity and for those extravagant legends of chivalry where mere events and coincidences are the main thing and little attention is given to human character.

Such was Chaucer's burdensome inheritance. He did not reject it. The wise man counts precious the stock the past brings him, enters into it heartily, but ever adds to and modifies it. It is a good saying that a man or nation that has no past is not likely to have a future. He who rebels against what he receives is apt to be

left meagre. But what is received must not be allowed to keep its outgrown character. The poet, at least, puts his own impress on all that comes his way. How just is Bacon's statement that the beauty of excellent art consists in the *homo additus naturæ*, the stamp of the human being set on the world around! And the remark is no less true of the world of inner experience, which tradition brings, than of the physical world reported by our senses. The poet accepts them both, but passes them through his special temperament.

At least so Chaucer did. All the rubbish of the past which I have assembled in my previous paragraph Chaucer uses about as abundantly as do his contemporaries. Obvious moralizing does not disturb him. Sonorous divinity, frequent quotation, magical agencies, strained allegory, belief in absurd legends — yes, even the dream as the framework of a tale — all the literary furniture of his time he cheerfully adopts. His stories are often not his own, but have been already told by Latin, Italian, or French writers, he recasting them according to his fancy. He often strikes one as too modest, over docile, too much inclined to look up to those who are beneath him. Yet he borrows

nothing that he does not transform. Dead matter of the past he fills with living character. Vivid individual portraiture which hitherto had hardly been attempted in English literature, is Chaucer's passion. All his improbable stories, stuffed with theologic, moral and physical lore are prized by him as material for the setting of endless varieties of mankind. Just as it exists, he rejoices in humanity, in its squalor, splendor, misfortune, tragedy. All gives him what he wants, the opportunity to depict. No doubt unworthy people are often his subjects, coarse and degraded people. A coarse man too is sure to think coarse thoughts and use coarse words. He who depicts him accurately must not be squeamish over foulness. Chaucer is not. In its indication of character he even takes a hearty pleasure. On the other hand Chaucer's world abounds in high-bred knights, priests, scholars, lawyers, administrators, with attractive, refined and dutiful women not a few, all trained from youth to noble thought and gentle manners; and to these again Chaucer does imaginative justice. His aim everywhere is that announced by Shakspere, "to hold the mirror up to nature." If Chaucer can only get the moving world —

the human world as he sees it in rich variety around him, — if he can get this actual world transferred to his pages, and make us as interested as himself in the queer actions, the absurdities, the glories, the degradations even, of his fellow men he will be content. His dramatic power is extreme. He suits each tale to the character of him who tells it.

But if the desire to keep close to reality is the distinctive mark of Chaucer, can we give his writings the name of poetry? By doing so shall we not come into conflict with the doctrine of our first chapter? There it appeared that the antithesis of poetry was not prose, but fact. Poetry, being the conscious transmission of emotion into responsive minds, may use as its medium verse or prose, if only what it transmits is something else than fact. Accordingly we have defined poetry as a fragment of reality seen through a temperament, and have regarded the temperament as the more important part of the mixture. Now if we merely hold a mirror up to nature and content ourselves with what is reflected there, we leave out exactly that which is precious. Many therefore deny the name of poetry to narrative verse, and with much plausibility. Verse

that furnishes information about men and things, however subtle that information may be and conveyed in however delicate phrases, is after all only exquisite prose. The name of poetry should be reserved for that which conveys emotion, and this descriptive verse need not do.

With such views I largely agree and hold that so far as any verse fixes attention on a mere sequence of happenings, its poetry recedes. But I also feel that such opinions should in no way lessen our admiration of Chaucer. He interests us not primarily by the facts he presents, but by his emotional presentation. His is a marvelous temperament. That multitude of curiously diversified persons to whom he introduces us is seen through an exceptional reflecting medium. Nowhere else is such *bonhomie* to be found, such candor, such indisposition to judge — at least to judge harshly — such modesty, such incessant playfulness, such power of pathos and of memorable utterance. It is because this golden glow is over all his pages that we turn to them as artistry. Most of the information recorded there is rubbish and negligible. But the poetry is abundant and precious.

The few events of his life that are surely known show him to have been fortunately trained for the office of human interpreter. No doubt another man might pass through his experiences and bring out a different result. We cannot judge circumstances without reference to the character they affect. Perhaps a character like Chaucer's would have turned the most unpromising to profit. But certainly there are few men who through a long career can be counted so continuously fortunate.

Fortune favored him at the start, making him a member of no single class. He was not of noble birth and so cut off from knowledge of the common lot; not even a university man, disciplined into undue reverence for the past. He came out of the ranks of trade. Indeed his father followed a trade most suitable for the parent of so genial a gentleman. His father was a wine merchant in good circumstances, who probably supplied wines to the court. Nothing is known of his son's youth till in 1357 we find him mentioned as being measured for a suit of livery in the train of the wife of the Duke of Clarence, one of the King's sons. That is, he now crosses the border line, leaves the men of commerce, and joins the noble class,

with which his life is henceforth allied. Chaucer is an excellent climber. He never goes backward in the social scale. He loves all that is rich and splendid and is skilful in appropriating a good share to himself. By the time he is a man, therefore, Chaucer is acquainted both with court and commonalty.

Critics divide his life into four periods; the first, the period of his youth, running from about 1340 — the date of his birth is not certain — to 1360. Few events are reported of him in this period. There is his change in station, probably too he began early to write verse; and then in 1359, as a soldier in the Hundred Years' War, he crossed with the English army to France, was taken prisoner there, and ransomed a year later. Such an experience of war and imprisonment might naturally produce rancor toward the foe. But in Chaucer's kindly soul there was no room for rancor. On the contrary, this imprisonment gave him an opportunity to know his sweet enemy, France, and to become better acquainted with French literature. He always remained an admirer of things French, though eight or ten years later he took part in another campaign in France.

A second period of Chaucer's life is that be-

tween 1360 and 1372. Near the beginning of this period he seems to have left the service of the Duke of Clarence for that of the King and to have come under the special patronage of his powerful son John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster. In 1366 he married Philippa, one of the ladies in waiting on the Queen. Her last name is not known. Throughout this time he wrote under French influence and, always disposed to over-estimate the powers of others in comparison with his own, he busied himself with translating and adapting the beautiful French poetry which he had learned to enjoy. During this time he was rapidly advancing in court favor, in power and property.

In 1372 a new period of his life begins and extends to 1386. In 1372 he was sent to Italy to settle some perplexing questions of trade. A year was spent in Genoa and Florence. In Italy he found the Renaissance even more advanced than in France and of course much more than in remote England. He came under the influence of Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio. They opened to him a new world of beauty and gave fresh impulse to his poetic powers. For while Chaucer is a courtier, soldier, envoy, practical man of affairs, he is also persistently

a writer, eager not merely to enjoy the world but also to report it for the enjoyment of others. His audience too was a definite one. He was a singer to court circles, to those who valued entertainment and the light touch more than earnest reflection. His verse needed to be attractive. The years from 1372 to 1386 have been called Chaucer's Italian period when the influence of Italy succeeded that of France. But the period involved much business besides. During it Chaucer served seven times as a foreign envoy.

By 1386 there is reason to believe he had set himself seriously to planning and composing the "Canterbury Tales." A truly English poetry is here begun. Chaucer has found himself, has cast off foreign influences and henceforth ventures to set forth what he discovers in ordinary English life. And now for the first time there fell upon him a few years of hardship, hardship which he did not allow to check his poetic activity. On the contrary, he seized on the unwonted leisure and made it helpful for his great design. In 1388, Parliament obliged the young King Richard II to dismiss his uncle, John of Gaunt, Chaucer's constant friend and protector, and to put himself under

the guidance of Gaunt's brother and enemy, Gloucester. Chaucer shared in the disfavor of his patron. He was no longer acceptable at court, was dropped from his offices, obliged to mortgage his pensions, and the splendid house which had been his was taken away. He shows at this time every sign of hardship. At the beginning too of this dark period his wife died. But hardship could not long attend a man so cheerful, attractive, and useful. When in 1389 John of Gaunt was recalled, offices were once more given to Chaucer, and for his remaining years he had little to complain of except that his income was not always sufficient for his expensive modes of living. Throughout his life, with the exception of the brief period mentioned, all that men desire seems to have been his. Besides holding other lucrative offices, he was comptroller of wool, collector of customs, Clerk of the King's Works, inspector of roads, and member of Parliament. Yet he pursued intellectual beauty through all his busy days and, coming in contact with a wide range of human nature, he enjoyed it all and delighted to depict its varieties for our delectation.

In the "Canterbury Tales" Chaucer assem-

bles twenty-nine characters, men and women, each sharply distinguished from the rest and each representing a social type. We have here a kind of epitome of English society. It has been well said that if all other histories of the time should perish, Chaucer's book alone remaining, we might know pretty well how the people of those days lived. These twenty-nine having assembled at the Tabard Inn in London, set forth on horseback the following day on a pilgrimage to the shrine of St. Thomas of Canterbury. Pilgrimages were at that time the popular mode of combining diversion, piety, good company, and safe travel. To relieve the tedium of the way the host of the Tabard Inn, their leader, proposed that each should tell a couple of tales on the way to Canterbury and a couple more on the way home. Of course the scheme, if seriously intended, was too ambitious and remained unfinished. Only twenty-four tales are recorded. But how vivid these are! How marked with the high spirits, the keen observation, the humor and narrative skill of him who was the first in our poetry to study his fellow men! We cannot suppose all the tales to have been written during the last years of Chaucer's life. He is more likely to

have then brought together much of the work of previous years, to have reshaped it with ripened judgment for his immediate purpose, to have added certain new tales, and then to have set forth the whole, happily welded together with interludes of talk, as a kind of Comédie Humaine of the English people.

Here then is the first great type of English poetry, that observational type which underlies all others. The aim is pure representation, the joyous exhibit of the world as we find it. It is inapposite to complain that it offers us no high ideals. Certainly not. Why should Chaucer concern himself with such perplexing things? Would he have been able to depict his characters with his present hearty accuracy if he had also felt obliged to weigh the worth of their springs of action? Instead, he makes his cheerful sun to shine on the just and on the unjust. In his eyes degraded and exalted are of equal interest. That is, he works as Shakspere works, dealing as fairly with his villains as with the purest of his heroines. All are here. There is nothing one-sided in his picture. Only it is mere depicting, re-presentation. Feeling strongly the glow of the world and marvelously endowed with the power to transfer that glow

to his pages, he sits in judgment on no man. Yet where, outside Shakspere, can such a multifold world be seen? How we may enlarge our experience if, putting ourselves under Chaucer's guidance, we let him introduce us to the delightfully mixed society he knew! For while his subjects are often drawn from antiquity, from legends of Greece and Rome as well as from the credulous stories of the Middle Ages, the men and women in them come straight from the streets of London. Even when their names are those of great ones of old, their characters are such as Chaucer knew.

To what extremes Chaucer was ready to carry abstention from praise and blame in order to remain true to his special task of dispassionate dramatic narration may best be seen if we recall the four momentous events of his time: the great war with France, the religious awakening under Wiclif and his followers, the Black Death which destroyed half the population of England, and the rising of the wretched farm-laborers under Wat Tyler. One would think that such occurrences would have power to turn any one from pleasant story-telling and oblige some expression of personal emotion. Chaucer was closely involved in

them all. He was a soldier in the first. His patron, John of Gaunt, favored the second. The third was carrying off his friends and acquaintances by the hundred. And the fourth shook London to its foundations. Yet from no writing of Chaucer's could one guess the significance of any of these tremendous events. While minutely faithful in reporting the characters of his age, he keeps prudently clear of mentioning its incidents. Wise courtier he!

To carry over to his readers such novel moods of mind as these, so making them feel the living world as he felt it, Chaucer needed technical instruments of wider compass and flexibility than he at first possessed. A few standard verse-forms had answered well enough most previous requirements, and several of them Chaucer retained and managed with heightened skill. The early alliterative verse, still continued in "Piers Plowman," and also the "fourteener" — seven iambic feet — a favorite measure of rhyming chroniclers and popular balladists, he discarded. He kept, however, another common metre of the time, the octosyllabic, of four iambics, perceiving how well it suited subjects of such easy grace as those of this "Boke of the Duchesse." His

contemporary, Gower, had employed it for solid narrative and grave reflection, for which it was little fit. Milton followed Chaucer's lead in his "Allegro" and "Penseroso," though with exquisite variations of the foot; and Butler found in it the appropriate medium for the irresponsible mockery of "Hudibras."

Another form inherited by Chaucer and brought by him to perfection is the Rhyme Royal, seven pentameter lines rhyming *ababbcc*, and differing from our ordinary six-lined stanza only by the insertion of a line between the quatrain and the final couplet. This line, delaying and poising the stanza, and giving it fuller body, imparts to it a delicate lingering beauty which the six-lined form lacks. To it is due much of the pathetic majesty of "Troilus and Criseyde." In the age immediately after Chaucer Rhyme Royal was much in fashion. Then for a time it fell out of favor. Wordsworth used it in "The Leech-Gatherer." And it is pleasant to see Morris and Masefield showing by their right comprehension of its aptitudes that they are true metrical children of Chaucer.

But if only a few standard measures lay ready to Chaucer's hand, he set his own strong

mark on those few and added to them one which has proved of extreme value in English verse. He is the inventor of the heroic couplet, the measure in which ten syllables, five iambic feet, make up a line which rhymes with a similar one following. In the connecting rhyme the couplet finds its unity, becoming thus the shortest of English stanzas. Already we have seen octosyllabic couplets, but these were inadequate for Chaucer's purpose. He needed a more wealthy and weighty line. He added therefore an iambic foot to each octosyllabic line, still keeping the rhyme. In this way he obtained something peculiarly suitable for story-telling. Within a fairly capacious couplet a piece of reality is, as it were, broken off. After this has been contemplated as a united whole, the reader passes to a further section of the story in a second couplet, and so on. Or if reality appears thus too disjointed, it is easy to check the pause at the end of any couplet and send the thought directly on into the succeeding line. So by arranging run-over or end-stopped lines different metrical effects can be fitted to different moods of mind.

This form of verse has ever since been found immensely useful in more ways than that in

which Chaucer employed it. It serves admirably for epigrammatic and moral sayings. Words of wisdom are doubly impressive when massed in this brief but sufficient compass. Indeed the measure fits so well many ends that it has become one of our commonest. But that very flexibility exposes it to dangers. It may easily lack dignity and continuous interest. Managed as it is by Chaucer, it is an instrument of great power and animation. I have called Chaucer the inventor of this verse, the heroic couplet, as it has been named. More exactly he is its introducer. Five foot iambic lines existed before his time, and occasional instances of combining them into a couplet could no doubt be found in French poetry. But Chaucer was the first to perceive the importance of such a couplet, to develop its possibilities, and through his weighty example to bring it into familiar use.

SUGGESTIONS FOR READING

For Chaucer's sharp drawing of individual character, read the Prologue of the "Canterbury Tales." Or, if only a few sections can be read, "The Knighte," lines 43–78, "The Prioresse," lines 118–162, "The Cook," lines 285–308, "The Persoun," lines 477–528, "The Miller," lines 545–564, will show the range and accuracy of his portraiture.

Read too, for continuous humor, "The Nonne Preestes Tale," with its Prologue as an example of the conversations on the road.

For splendid description, "The Temple of Mars in The Knightes Tale," lines 1970–2050.

For psychologic and dramatic insight, the meeting of the lovers in "Troilus and Criseyde," bk. II, st. 88–97.

For spirited action, the sea-fight of Cleopatra, in the "Legend of Good Women," lines 624–665.

For lightness of touch in depicting a charming lady, "The Boke of the Duchesse," lines 805–906.

III

Edmund Spenser

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In the popular mind Chaucer and Spenser are grouped together, as if separated by only a brief interval. In reality two hundred years intervene. What this means we can make clearer by saying that there is the same distance between the "Canterbury Tales" and "The Faerie Queene" as there is between the latter and the "Lyrical Ballads" of Wordsworth; that is, the interval would stretch across two thirds of all poetry since Spenser's time. How does it happen, then, that we so confuse the eras of the two? There are two grave reasons, apart from the fact that Spenser looks up to Chaucer as his master and speaks of him as the one whom poetically he follows. In the first place, distance is regularly "foreshortened in the tracts of time." In looking far back we do not measure intervals with anything like the vividness we feel for those that have recently passed. But more misleading still is the barrenness of the intervening period. Names

enough of poets appear in these centuries, respectable men who have each done something to keep the tradition of poetry unbroken, but they are men of mediocre power. Such was the little group immediately around Chaucer — Gower, Lydgate, Occleve. The writers who followed — Skelton, Hawes, Barclay — were unable to hold the path which Chaucer had marked out. They could not write verse of his flexible firmness. Their lines either, retaining his ten syllables, show a mechanical rigidity or more commonly through looseness of structure the line is almost lost. In the middle of the sixteenth century Wyatt, Surrey, Sackville, Gascoigne form a group of scholars interested in developing the resources of the language and in giving better structure to its verse. Their admirable work reaches its consummation in Spenser, with whom modern poetry begins. Reasons for the long delay are not far to seek. During these two centuries no man of anything like Chaucer's genius was born. Political conditions, too, were unfavorable; in the early time the Wars of the Roses, in the later the change from the Catholic to the Protestant faith. But probably a greater hindrance was the unsettled state of the language itself.

As the perplexing final *e* used by Chaucer gradually disappeared from popular speech, it became increasingly difficult to read him metrically. His great example was lost, and it became necessary to formulate again the principles of English prosody. This was accomplished by Spenser and the group immediately preceding him.

We have seen how Chaucer had perfected a type of poetry expressive of satisfaction with the world as it stands — *joie de vivre*, delight in everything that belongs to man. The form which this observational verse assumes is naturally the narrative, a form by no means confined to Chaucer. He was merely the first to unfold its dramatic possibilities. But narrative poets are common throughout the following ages, though few of these story-tellers possess Chaucer's vital interest in humanity. Spenser himself once tried this type in "Mother Hubberd's Tale," and wisely abandoned it. In the seventeenth century it was extensively used. Chamberlayne's "Pharonida," Davenant's "Gondibert," Chalkhill's "Thealma and Clearchus" are examples. In the eighteenth century it declined and was largely superseded by aphoristic verse and prose fiction. When

once the novel is established there would seem to be no more need of narrative verse. But on the contrary, descriptive poetry takes on new life. With the nineteenth century, Scott writes rhymed and unrhymed novels. Crabbe follows hard after Chaucer in depicting the life of his time, and a long train of narrative poets follow, each having his own special color. In Byron and Shelley the tale becomes doctrinaire. Hunt, Keats, and William Morris revive its earlier narrative interest. The last especially has often been mistaken for a child of Chaucer. He has stirring stories much after the fashion of the "Canterbury Tales," and frequently too he uses Chaucer's couplet and Rhyme Royal. Yet what a gulf separates Morris's work from Chaucer's! The two are antithetic. For Chaucer is not merely a story-teller. He tells stories of his own time, fills them with the things and people he knew, and even when taking his plots from antiquity so modernizes them as to give them the traits the men and women of his England actually had. Morris is altogether romantic. His characters are dream-creatures. They generally profess to have come from afar and they use a language which no human being ever spoke. They have more

kinship with Spenser than with Chaucer. But while narrative poetry may thus be used for romantic purposes rather than realistic, the type as first established aimed at a representation of the actual world, though even then it was the temperament of the writer which gave to the narrative its poetic charm.

In general it may be said that the maturity of our enjoyment of poetry can be fairly measured by the degree of importance we attach to its emotional as contrasted with its realistic elements. Narrative poetry is elementary. With it poetic interest begins. Children and primitive people want a story and little else, except strongly marked rhythm. As artistic taste becomes refined, incident retreats and is regarded merely as a basis for emotional development. It is the same with our enjoyment of pictures. We at first prefer those that tell a story. Of each we ask what it is all about? But by degrees we come to see that the anecdotic power of the painter has little to do with his art. As an artist, his mind is on other things — on color, on light and shade, on the harmony of lines, the balance of masses. He looks upon his figures as important only so far as they mirror a mood of mind, and the instruments

for conveying that mood are the technical matters I have mentioned.

Curiously enough we have recently seen one of the fine arts move in the opposite direction. Up to our time music had aimed at pure beauty; "absolute music" we called it, the emotional concord and sequence of sounds. But it occurred to certain ingenious persons that they might by manipulating sounds suggest a story and represent facts. So program-music has been bewildering us all. Strange, that just when in painting we are coming to regard the story as a mere auxiliary of the picture, and notwithstanding the fact that the poets have long known something similar to be true in their art, the musicians are now endeavoring to tell us stories and are disparaging the æsthetic cadences which have pleased the world so long!

If what I have been saying is sound and description, accordance with outward fact, is but a subordinate part of poetry, its mere starting-point, then we might expect a type of poetry to arise which should be the very opposite of Chaucer's. A poet might well desire to withdraw as far as possible from subjection to fact and find in verse a veritable

refuge from reality. For that real world, which Chaucer enjoyed so much, oppresses many. Its natural laws, governing inexorably physical change, often seem hostile to man. They ignore our ideals and conflict with our desires. Yet ideals and desires are all that lend life worth. It is no wonder, then, that in every literature certain poets turn disdainfully away from reality and live in a region of ideal emotion. They allow themselves only so much contact with actual experience as will bring the creative impulse into play. The master of all these poetic idealists is Edmund Spenser.

Spenser and Chaucer, so often coupled in our thought, have only the relation to one another of a complete and supplemental antithesis. Spenser, it is true, regarded Chaucer as his master, and no doubt gained from Chaucer much acquaintance with the metrical tools of his trade. But he understood the substance of Chaucer as little as Virgil understood Homer. His office it was to develop a type of poetry not hitherto known. Let us try to grasp the central thought of this new type and see how naturally the special qualities of Spenser's poetry result from it. We have already noticed his alienation from actual existence, and his

absorption in a world created by himself. This constant tendency is manifested in a variety of ways. I will examine a few of them.

Spenser is busied with the abstract and general, nature with individuals. Nature knows John and Susan, not universal man; blades of grass, not grass. Everywhere we meet only particular existences. General objects, such as classes, laws, abstract ideas, are products of our minds, put upon multitudinous nature for our convenience of comprehension or memory. Similarity, and those connecting relationships from which generalization springs, belong to the beholding mind rather than to existing things. Chaucer understands this and in his naturalistic poetry gives us no picture of man as man nor, of what is more attractive, of woman as woman. Women abound, and all diverse — Criseyde, Emily, Blanche, Griselda, the wife of Bath — they are as vital creatures as those whom Shakspere knew. Spenser, on the other hand, turning ever away from reality, prefers the general to the specific. In none of his Books and Cantos shall we find a rounded, solid human being. All his figures are abstractions, qualities, detached from particular persons and generalized. What shadowy creatures

are Britomart, Belphœbe, Florimell, Duessa, Phædria! His frank personifications — Mammon, Mutabilitie — have more blood in them. And in all this Spenser is true to type. Concrete individuals belong to that physical universe from which he, as a good Platonist, turns away. His home is in a world of ideas.

Spenser is moral, too, and lays great stress on distinctions of right and wrong, beautiful and ugly. Nature knows no such values. Whatever of hers happens to fit our desires we rightly enough call good or valuable. Such classifications belong, however, not to nature but to our judging minds. Good and bad, high and low, noble and ignoble are words that express the relations which things bear to us. They do not mark qualities in the things themselves or in relations between things. Parted from man nothing is good, nothing bad. Each object merely exists, that is all. To get moral or æsthetic worth it must be studied with reference to some human need. Chaucer, as a true naturalist, does not sit in judgment. He watches whatever conduct occurs and reports it vivaciously, whether men call it good or bad. Nobody is condemned. The coarse must be coarse, the refined refined. That is the way

men are made, and so Chaucer lets them appear. But such natural equality is shocking to Spenser. He is ever applying moral standards, discriminating those desires which ennoble from those which degrade. In his ideal world the struggle between good and evil, beauty and ugliness, is incessant.

This contrast between the two poets is especially striking in their estimate of womankind. Chaucer knew women well. He married early, early became a page at court, and was never shut off from women by keeping terms at a university. Through his long life as courtier, ambassador, civic officer, he met women of every rank and character. He made them interesting objects of study, precisely as he did men. He saw their beauty, gentle manners, and pretty caprices; their love of pleasure, praise, dress, change, intrigue; their piety, forgiving spirit, and hardy fidelity to those they love. Cool and dispassionate, he watched these dispositions and many more mingle in all degrees, shadings, and contrarieties, till each woman emerged on his pages as distinct a personality as any man, and quite as amusing. On the other hand Spenser's acquaintance with women seems to have been slight and

artificial. After seven years at the university he spent a short time in the country, where he probably experienced a disappointment in love. During most of his remaining years he was either accompanying the army in Ireland or living in his castle there alone. To him, therefore, woman is always something far away and ethereal, an exalted object of aspiration, the guiding spirit of us poor men. Few differential qualities are reported to distinguish one woman from another, but all alike conform to the angelic pattern — angelic or devilish; for when an angel falls, it becomes a devil. A perverted woman is consequently a fiercer power for evil than ever a man can be. She is as horrible as true woman is worshipful, and all are completely the one or the other. How rightly fictitious is all this! How suitable for him who flies reality, thinks only in abstractions, and feels life itself to be but a struggle of right and wrong!

The contrast between realist and idealist appears again in the poetic form employed. Spenser's is the allegory, Chaucer's the narrative, and each has chosen wisely. Chaucer, concerned as he was with noting things as they appear, perceived that everything is linked

with everything, what now exists containing within itself the causes of what will be hereafter. Nothing in the real world is stationary. All is in an orderly flux. To trace the fixed sequences and set them in orderly narration is the business of the good observer. But Spenser is something more than an observer. He is not content to stand smiling while the world runs its close-linked course, neglectful of ideals. That sorry scheme of things he will shatter and by allegory "remould it nearer to the heart's desire." With him ideals control circumstances and laws of nature have little respect shown them. On his pages things happen which are grossly improbable, yet do not disturb us. The current of events is guided by personal agencies. The semblance of real life gives place to a glorious dream of what life should be, and rigid narrative yields to easeful allegory. Let us not condemn. A similar instinct is in us all. Worried by business, by the unkind word of a friend, by the illness of one we love, we turn if we are wise to the piano and for half an hour escape the jarrings of reality. Here we enter a realm of beauty where everything is harmonious. Such is Spenser's conception of poetry. It is intentionally unreal, a refuge, a restorative.

This difference of mental attitude affects even the speech of the two poets. Chaucer employs the sturdy words of ordinary life. It is true he had a wide range to choose from. Latin, Saxon, Norman-French were all current in his time, and his judicious choice among them largely helped to establish a distinctive English tongue. Hardly any other writer has had such wide linguistic influence. But that is because he sought words of clearness, weight, and durable significance. Whatever words were good for prose served Chaucer for poetry. But since for Spenser a great gulf is fixed between poetry and reality, the diction of the one is unfit for the other. He adopts a mode of expression which delights by its very unfamiliarity. He resuscitates old words, coins new ones, in short produces such a conglomerate of language as never proceeded from human lips, but which is exactly suited to beautiful allegories. He has an extraordinary sensitiveness to the carrying power of words and picks them with a view not merely to their central meaning, but to that penumbra of feeling which surrounds them. His delicious diction transports us to a fairy region whose inhabitants, we may imagine, eat cake instead of bread. The language of the streets is not for such unearthly beings.

In calling attention to these contrasts with the realistic Chaucer I hope I have not dwelt unduly on the qualities which the dreamy Spenser does not possess. His avoidance of all that is specific, his refusal to take part in a non-moral world, his allegorizing and slender regard for fact, his substitution of a poetic diction for that of ordinary life are not defects, but essential elements of his power and charm. For he is aiming elsewhere than the observing or reflective mind. We should approach him primarily as a painter or a musician. The effect of his poetry is not unlike that of the splendid pageants much cultivated in his time. The eye is feasted with a succession of graceful forms and brilliant scenes, shadowing forth some moral truth. He inherits from the Moralities which the Church had patronized in the age preceding his, where the several vices and virtues were exhibited with just enough fantastic narrative to stick them together. In Spenser's own time Court pageants abounded. He had fed his eye on gorgeous drapery, stately bearing, equable motions. He was familiar with the blazonry of war. All this he transfers to his pages, informs it with a moral; and makes it yield us just such a thrill as a beholder

would feel. We may call Spenser the supreme showman, for he writes as the painter paints; only that he is occupied not so much with minute observation of single facts as with the exuberant glory reflected from the entire scene. Space and generality are essential elements of Spenser's power. He has fewer quotable lines than most poets, but more magnificent stanzas.

Or shall we rather call him the supreme musician? Certainly no other among our poets, unless his pupil Milton, has given to words such distributed harmony, so flexible are his lines, so smooth-slipping, so welcome as mere sound. Only in this field, too, as in that of scenery, his effects are broad and massive, even when most subtle. He uses much alliteration and abundant tone-color, but both are employed to link his passage and propel the reader on. They do not invite us to pause and admire the curious art, as do inferior and tinkling poets. All the traditional metres of his predecessors are at his command, but he has distinct preferences among them. The octosyllabic couplet, a favorite before his time, he uses only in the Envoy to "The Shepherd's Calendar." There is not room in it for splendor. The decasyllabic couplet, too, which Chaucer if he did not invent

at least domesticated, is used by Spenser but once or twice. Couplet measures have too short a flight. But he uses with extreme delicacy the more complex metres: — the six, seven, and eight lined stanzas of iambic decasyllables. The special cadences appropriate to each he brings out with a sweetness never heard before. Especially delightful to my ear is his handling of the seven-lined stanza, Chaucer's Rhyme Royal.

But these are all too weak for his ultimate and heaven-scaling purpose. For transporting us from our "too, too solid earth" to fairyland he builds the most magnificent structure English poetry possesses. We name it from him the Spenserian stanza and almost demand its use whenever in our time voluminous emotion sways a poet's mind. The stanza is long, but its nine lines are lashed together by an ingenious rhyming system, *ababbcbcc*. So large a block is in danger of falling apart; to prevent which, the same sound is repeated over and over, two of the repetitions falling at critical points, the middle and end of the stanza. The summing-up to a culminating close is aided by this repetition, but gains its supreme impressiveness through the simple device of two extra sylla-

bles in the last line. Instead of being constructed with five iambics, like the rest, the concluding line has six, a form of line first used in a French poem celebrating the deeds of Alexander and hence known subsequently as an Alexandrine. What astonishing effects are worked by this long supplemental line, forming, as it does, a noticeable pause, summarizing its stanza, and at the same time supplying a link to bind stanza to stanza! Surveying the stanza as a whole, one must see that no other could so surely convey the splendors on which Spenser's heart is set. The needful magic is in the web of it.

The Spenserian stanza, however, came slowly into general use. Whether on account of its novelty or because poets hesitated to rival Spenser's magnificence, only a few varieties of it appeared during the seventeenth century. The eighteenth had too little sensuous feeling to find it congenial; and while Thomson, Shenstone, Beattie, and a few others made trial of it, their results are effortful and pretty remote from Spenser's. With the Romantic Movement at the beginning of the nineteenth century this stanza, like much else in the early poetry, was revived and once more " bards of

passion and of mirth " developed its riches. In it Byron, Shelley, Keats, Arnold have written their masterpieces. To-day there is no lack of honor for Spenser's great achievement.

But we shall not lend an ear of just appreciation either to it or to Spenser's other poetry if we fail to observe that it is not to our intelligence that he primarily makes appeal. He does not rouse us to thought; he would turn us from it rather. It is no paradox to say that he distinctly aims at monotony. At first it would seem a fatal aim for a poet. Many unconsciously attain it. Spenser persistently seeks it and uses it as one of his chief poetic resources. It is easy to see why. Like all musicians he desires not to instruct, but to throw us into an emotional mood. To accomplish this he must lull us, weave over us a hypnotic spell. When we hypnotize a person we take from him all diversity of interest, confining his attention to certain selected aspects of things. Then we can introduce whatever ideas we will. In some such way Spenser makes use of monotony. Listening to his magic music, we withdraw our thoughts largely from the specific statements made, receiving chiefly a soothing lull. As this overcomes us, the mood is induced which Spen-

ser predestined. How subtle he is in producing this mood all know who have examined his stanza critically. With what delicacy the alliterative throb is introduced, so that while its effect is felt the means are hidden. The harmonizing vowel-color which he distributes throughout a stanza is exactly congruous with the mood he would induce. The same musical purpose directs his manipulations of the line. Somewhere near their middle all lines require a brief pause, known as the "cæsura." Placing the cæsura here or there will vary the music and modify the mood. So will halting the line at its close or giving it continuity with the next. Spenser uses both, but is more inclined to the latter, caring much for swing and flow in his stanza. Often he will sweep a stanza through its entire length with no full pause from first word to last. All these artifices, like those of the musician, are employed by Spenser with sure-handed skill to carry us away from inharmonious reality to the shining regions of fairyland.

Spenser's life, 1552–1599, covers one of the supreme periods of English history, including, as it does, the Spanish wars with the defeat of the Armada, the struggle with Mary, Queen of

Scots, the exploration of a new world, and the establishment of a new faith. In certain respects there is a strange analogy between his life and Chaucer's. Each lived in the reign of a heroic sovereign who was felt to embody the aspirations of an awakening people. Glorious wars too were in progress; in Chaucer's time the Hundred Years' War with France, in the time of Spenser the Spanish and Irish wars. But there were no such desolating domestic conflicts as the Wars of the Roses, carried on in the barren interval between Chaucer and Spenser. Fortunate epochs those, for both poets!

In Spenser's life, however, we may find some grounds for his exaltation of a dream-world above the actual. The details of that life, it is true, are almost as few and doubtful as those in the case of Chaucer. But the dates of birth and death are fixed with some degree of certainty, as well as those of the three periods into which Spenser's life may naturally be divided: (1) the years of education, 1552–1576, up to the time when Spenser left the University; (2) the *Wanderjahre*, or unsettled time, 1576–1588; and the *Meisterjahre*, or time of consummate power, 1588–1599. Of the other known

events in the life of Spenser I touch on only those which illustrate the type of his poetry.

(1) Like Chaucer he comes of commercial stock, his father being a London cloth merchant. Characteristically, and unlike Chaucer, he romances on his birth and imagines himself connected with the noble house of Spenser, a claim which has not been substantiated. But he early turned away from trade, was prepared for the University at the Merchant Tailors School in London, and entered Pembroke College, Cambridge, in 1569 as a sizar, or poor student — as we say, on a scholarship. Here he met three strong influences, all tending to draw him away from the world about him. The first was classicism. We all know how in the early Renaissance the discovery of classical art and literature brought to man a more intimate knowledge of himself and a closer acquaintance with nature. But as the Renaissance advanced, and especially in the later Renaissance of Spenser's time, classical interests became an excuse for departure from the simplicity of nature and for magnifying the worth of ornament, a tendency always strong in Spenser. Classical studies of this artificial sort were much in vogue in the Cambridge of Spen-

ser's time and deeply affected him. A leader in the movement was Spenser's special friend, Gabriel Harvey. This thorough-going pedant, who had lost all sense of present reality through devotion to antiquity, was attempting to induce Englishmen to abandon their native mode of accentual verse for the quantitative classical measures. While Spenser did not permanently adopt this absurdity, the influence of Harvey and his circle soon appeared: disastrously in the artificial pastoralism of "The Shepherd's Calendar," dedicated to Harvey, and beneficially in the experiments there undertaken for enlarging the range of English metres. A collateral gain from the acquaintance with Harvey is a series of letters between the friends which form a valuable source for our knowledge of Spenser's life at the time they were written.

A still more powerful influence then at work in the University, and especially at Pembroke College, was the rising Puritanism which was teaching men to live for things eternal and fostering detachment from things temporal. Into this early and lofty Puritanism Spenser entered with ardor. We have seen how profoundly moral he always is. While his temperament is unmistakably rich and sensuous, while the

pageantry of the Roman Church and its mythological history appealed strongly to him, still stronger was the appeal of morality, the call to organize our nature, putting certain sides of it down and others up. This conflict of flesh and spirit within us was the dominant note of Puritanism. It took an abiding hold on beauty-loving Spenser. So that Milton's adjectives do not go astray — as seldom do adjectives of Milton's — when he speaks of "sage and serious Spenser."

One more unworldly influence, perhaps underlying the other two, deserves mention. At the University Spenser became acquainted with Plato, the father of all idealists. The "Symposium," the "Phædrus," the "Republic," the "Timæus," were books which fed his imagination. He accepted whatever he found there. Plato removed him from our earth and taught him to believe that things of earth are illusory; a faint copy of "ideas" or "patterns" of things eternal in the heavens. This Platonism pervades Spenser throughout and comes to a peculiarly beautiful expression in his "Hymns in Honor of Love and Beauty."

(2) Leaving the University in 1576 without obtaining a fellowship or finding any secular

position, he went off to the country parts of Lancashire, from which section of England his family originally came. There he spent a year in farm life. One might expect such an experience to bring Spenser back into close contact with earth. Instead, it intensified his idealism. His beloved ancients had a way of looking only on the pretty side of farm life, the shepherd and his flock becoming creatures of romance. Theocritus and Virgil set the fashion of pastoral eclogues. Their Italian imitators just before Spenser's time followed on. The pastoral idealizes the squalid facts of the country, and Spenser turned to it at once, almost as a matter of course, to it and to that which usually professes to inspire it, love. For Spenser fell in love, he tells us, with the beautiful Rosalind who, hard-hearted and incapable of foreseeing the glory which awaited her lover, rejected him. He went back to the world disappointed. Disappointment is about as constant with Spenser as success with Chaucer.

Gabriel Harvey wrote of a possible position in the train of the Earl of Leicester. Spenser returned and obtained it. And now begins for him that life of court and state to which he had always aspired. He parallels Chaucer once

more in this that, born in the commercial class, he spends his life as a courtier. Yet the association with Leicester, promising as it seemed, planted permanent seeds of disaster. Burleigh, the Chief Councillor of Elizabeth, was hostile to Leicester. Consequently again and again when Spenser had hopes of court favor he found himself cut off as a dependent of Leicester's. During the years of his service with Leicester in London he felt the fascination of young Sir Philip Sidney whose character and powers, no less than his literary idealism, closely resembled his own. Spenser always retained for Sidney unbounded admiration, in verse lamenting more than once his early death. In his eyes, as in those of most men of the time, Sidney was the model of accomplished knighthood.

In 1580 the lord-lieutenancy of Ireland was given to the uncle of Sidney, Lord Grey of Wilton. Spenser had not succeeded in obtaining preferment at court and took service with Grey as his secretary. For the following nineteen years, with the exception of two or three visits to England, disturbed Ireland was his home. The Irish were at the time in active rebellion, intriguing with the Spanish, and Grey

was sent over to put them down. England has never been gentle in dealing with Ireland, but the methods of butchery and colonization employed for the next two years surpassed all precedent. Spenser took part in all approvingly and no doubt was able to draw from the experience material for some of the contests with monsters in "The Faerie Queene"; for we happen to know from a letter of Harvey's that "The Faerie Queene" was begun in these years, and the building of its beauty must have been a welcome relief from the hideous scenes then met. When the rebellion was officially ended in 1582 and Lord Grey retired, Spenser remained, holding clerkships in one part and another of the island during its settlement until (3) in 1588 Kilcolman Castle, with a tract of adjoining country, was granted him for his services. The castle, which had belonged to the Earl of Desmond, the leader of the rebellion, stood on the bank of the small river Mulla in a picturesque part of the county of Cork. Here Spenser lived alone in stately banishment, pressing his great poem steadily on. In 1589 Sir Walter Raleigh visited him and found three Books of the poem already finished. He persuaded Spenser to accompany him back to

England, to publish what he had written, and look for favor and place at court. These earliest Books were accordingly printed in London in 1590. They brought him praise from the Queen and from the whole intellectual world, with the small pension of fifty pounds. He returned disappointed to Ireland and wrote his account of how "Colin Clout's Come Home Again." The fame, too, which he had now acquired in London made a market for other works written earlier. He put together two volumes of short pieces entitled "Complaints" and "Prosopopoia" and published them in 1591.

In 1594 he married, wrote his marvellous bridal song, "The Epithalamion," and published it with a series of love sonnets, called "Amoretti," the following year. From what family the lady came, or what were her circumstances, we do not know. We only hear of her beauty and refined womanliness. Her first name was the same as that of Spenser's mother, Elizabeth; her last name may have been Boyle. She brought him children and an apparently happy home during their few years together. Work on "The Faerie Queene" progressed so rapidly that in 1596 three more Books — hardly equal in poetic power to the

first three — were ready for the press. These, too, were taken to London and again brought him praise without preferment. He returned once more to exile, this time to destruction. In 1598 the Irish rebellion broke out anew. No attempt had been made to appease the country by anything except force. Spenser himself was known to have written a paper defending the methods of Lord Grey. In the absence of an English army, he found himself alone among an infuriated people. Kilcolman Castle was attacked, plundered, and burned. One of Spenser's children perished in the flames. The rest of the family fled to London. What happened there is uncertain. All we know is that in 1599 Spenser died in poverty, Ben Jonson says "for lack of bread." Though he had suffered in a public cause and was now recognized as the chief poetic glory of his age, in his extreme need he was left unhonored, deserted by the Crown. The Earl of Essex paid the expenses of his funeral, and at his own request he was laid beside Chaucer in Westminster Abbey.

Spenser's life was one long disappointment. He was always poor. He received no scholarly honor from his University. He was crossed in love, and found no career immediately opening

before him. For a year or two afterwards he was happy in the most exalted and congenial society of London, then for twenty years was obliged to live remote from friends and almost from civilization. He saw in Ireland military glory attended by savagery. In return for public service he was rewarded with stately seclusion. He won enough literary fame to prove that he deserved royal favor which, through court intrigue, somehow missed him. For five years he had a happy marriage, for six the smallest of pensions. A catastrophe overwhelmed him; he turned to his own people and met neglect with early death. It is this afflicted man who drew from his creative imagination a new type of poetry, a poetry of exquisite unreality, a music so magical as to lure us from thought and satisfy us with easeful dreams of gorgeous pageantry. Perhaps the severities of his actual life and the high romance of his verse are not unconnected.

Spenser probably formed his plan of "The Faerie Queene" early in life. We know that before he went to Ireland it was sufficiently started to receive Harvey's unfavorable criticism. According to "The Letter of the Author's" it was to consist of twelve Books.

But it was destined to be another instance of Spenserian disappointment. Only six Books were published during its author's life, and two Cantos of a seventh were found in manuscript after his death. Was a portion burned with his castle and child? It is unlikely that in the three years' interval between the last publication and Spenser's death so prolific a writer should have advanced his plan by only about a thousand lines. There are lists of many other pieces by him, known to his contemporaries and unknown to us. But at least enough has come down to us to satisfy most readers. "The Faerie Queene" alone measures 39,000 lines, about four times "Paradise Lost," twice "The Ring and The Book," and half as long again as the "Iliad" and "Odyssey" together.

Spenser's genius seems to require space. He liked the long line, the long stanza, the long Canto. Neatness and pithy sayings belong to a different type. His romantic verse, though called by himself "historical," has as little relation to orderly narrative as that of Ariosto or Tasso who, he says in his "Letter," were his models. His poetry is, like music, rather an affair of sound than of sense and contains within itself small provision for limitation, as

is also the case with the inordinate works of his two masters. Several English poets in whom this musical emphasis is strong, like Shelley and Swinburne, have shown a similarly dangerous fluency. Only rarely, as in Milton and Tennyson, has a highly sensitive ear been attended by intellectual insistence on compact form. Excellences are not altogether compatible. We are wise if we discern clearly the kind offered by each poet, if we accept it gratefully, and uncomplainingly turn elsewhere for worthy qualities of a different type.

SUGGESTIONS FOR READING

In "The Faerie Queene," Bk. II, C. 6, well illustrates Spenser's luxuriance, ease, and lulling power. Stanzas 2 and 32 of this canto contain no full stop. A beautiful employment of a single stop is in Stanza 15. Stanza 13 shows a species of link-verse, where the close of one line prompts the beginning of another. The fragmentary cantos of Bk. VII, "Of Mutabilitie," especially the two stanzas of Canto VIII, are among the weightiest ever written by Spenser. Good examples of personified Vices are Envy, Bk. I, C. 4, St. 30–33, and Mammon, Bk. II, C. 7, St. 3.

"The Epithalamion" should be read entire, and also the "Hymn in Honor of Beauty," expressing Spenser's Platonism.

In "Muiopotmos," lines 145–208, there is a passage in ottava rima of peculiar grace.

"Colin Clout's Come Home Again" has much biographical material presented in pastoral form.

As an example of Rhyme Royal a single magnificent stanza of "The Ruins of Time," lines 246–253, may serve.

IV

George Herbert

IV

GEORGE HERBERT

We have now before us in clear outline two contrasted types of poetry, the realistic and the idealistic. All around us is a miscellaneous moving world, and it will be one of the offices of poetry to exhibit that world. The realist will therefore make accuracy and vividness his tests of excellence and will merely inquire how completely the men and women about him present themselves on his pages. The natural form of his art will be the narrative. On the other hand, the idealist will always feel that whatever is distinctive of poetry lies beyond the actual. The poet's work is not reproduction. He should conceive a more spacious and noble world behind the one we know. In nature there are no moral standards. In her, too, everything is individual. A world of this irrational sort needs to be allegorized. The poet should deal with the general, especially with the worthy and unworthy. Let him not hesitate to speak of glorious dreams and stately impossibilities. Everything, in short, which

will help to remove us from our petty existence will be proper matter for poetry.

Here then are two opposed ideals. But however opposed, both really enter into all poetry. To some extent every poet is both a realist and an idealist. In offering a preliminary definition of poetry, I called it a fragment of reality seen through a temperament. It has a realistic basis and an idealistic superstructure; and the farther it moves in the idealistic direction, the more poetic will it appear. Rightly is Spenser counted the poet's poet, for in him we see the extreme to which poetic idealism can be carried. We must not then discharge either of these ideals but may look to see them repeated, in varying degrees and combinations, throughout the long line of English poetry.

But why cannot these two types be counted sufficient? How did it happen that immediately after Spenser's exquisite work was completed, it appeared antiquated and was succeeded by a new and hostile type? It was because poetry, oddly enough, had hitherto overlooked an important factor of experience, namely the poet himself. Chaucer revealed himself only incidentally and was not primarily concerned with other persons as selves. He never dis-

sected motives, studied aspirations, laid bare the waywardness and contradictions which lurk in the interior of each of us. He merely set down on his pages what can be externally observed. Nor did Spenser in his musical pageant exhibit his own soul. Yet that, after all, is the subject which presses most closely for expression. Within himself the poet might well find the whole material of his verse, and to that material the new type of poetry addresses itself.

To poetry of this subjective sort Dr. Johnson has blunderingly given the name "metaphysical." He knew little of philosophy, particularly of metaphysics, and probably used the word metaphysical merely to indicate something dark and mysterious. Still, he is on the right track, even if he does not put his finger on the precise point. These new writers are philosophic, that is they are studying the mind of man, the individual mind. They seek to examine their own moods and accurately to report them. Their true title would therefore be the psychological poets, inasmuch as they are occupied with the Ψυχή or soul of man. But it is unwise for a single writer to try to change the usage of a century. Having made

this protest, I shall generally employ the established designation. It will be understood that the men we are now to consider are observers no less than Chaucer, but observers of their inner life. They watch the moods which in the soberest of us chase one another with bewildering speed and they record them with insistent accuracy. That very accuracy it is, and not vagueness, which makes their poetry often difficult to comprehend. I believe we shall best understand their work, and mark its contrast with what had gone before, if we examine the importance they attach to love, religion, and the intellect.

Of course love-poems have always been written. Love we might call the universal theme of poetry. Almost all the motives of life are summed up in the attempt to merge one's incomplete self with the admired object of one's desire. But the cool elaborate way in which such forthgoing was treated by the poets of this time deserves notice. From Petrarch's Italy came the fashion of a serial study of the stages in the advance of the lover toward his lady. Neither she nor her lover's passion is shown to us as a whole, but rather in dissected details. Successive sonnets disclose the first approach,

the survey of her face, the paralleling of her beauty with everything imaginable; what was the first blind impulse toward her and what the many subsequent vacillations, the slightly greater nearness from day to day, her general coldness and occasional kindness, the lover's sense of unworthiness, his abasement, despair, jealousy, desolation through absence, and his final unbelievable reward.

No one of these phases of love is unusual. Poets before and since the sixteenth century have sung them all. But the systematization and conscious analysis of them became a set poetic theme for the first time in England during the last years of Elizabeth. We might name that theme the Lover's Progress and compare it with the standard theme of painting, the Virgin and Child. Each new painter takes up the theme of the Nativity and works upon it, regardless of whether he has ever felt sympathy for motherhood or childhood. It is a set pattern which he, as an apprentice, must elaborate. Just so did the poets accept the theme of the Lover's Progress, which had travelled from Italy through France to a rather belated arrival in England. Of course it was not exactly the Petrarchan series of sonnets

that was reproduced in England; but it was at least "an echo of it in the north wind sung." Sidney first called attention to the great theme. In his magnificent series of sonnets to Stella all the stages of love's course are worked out in detail. The only point, as it seems to me, in which the Stella series differs from the many which followed it is its particularity. Sonnet after sonnet in this series strikes one as proceeding from that individual person, Sir Philip Sidney, as relating to Penelope Devereux, and as inapplicable to any other pair.

Now, that is not the case in the great mass of love-sonnets produced in England at this time. Between 1591 and 1597 Sir Sidney Lee calculates that more than two thousand appeared, usually in groups. But there is little in them that is specific. For the most part they show no ardent passion in him who writes. They are literary exercises on a conventional theme. We have seen how it is the tendency of all idealistic work which falls under the influence of Spenser to deal with the general. But will men be contented to continue such an artificial method, to go on reporting the most vital of our passions in a standardized way? Will not some one arise to shatter the decorous

exhibit and set down the facts of his passionate experience in all their tumultuous reality? That was to be the work of John Donne, to tell of human moods as they veritably exist. He approaches love from a point of view opposed to that of Spenser. For Spenser himself produced a sonnet sequence, the "Amoretti," of precisely the regular pattern. Smoothly and pleasingly the verses run, with no indication of individual character or individual ardor. But Donne, not only in sonnets, but in lyrics of wide variety, pours forth his emotion with barbaric frankness. Naturally when one undertakes to paint passion in the precise color of individual experience he may be pushed far toward coarseness. Donne does not hesitate. His is a complex nature, involving all that characterized the later Renaissance — its audacity, its mystic piety, its forceful intellectualism, its love of adventure, and of all that is bizarre.

Here then we see a conception of love antagonistic to the generalities of Spenser and the fashionable sonnetteers, one absorbed in individual experience. Such a change does not come on a sudden. The germs of it have long been working in England. The drama has

arisen, in which characters present themselves contrasted with one another, not in the Chaucerian way by mere diversity of outward conduct. In the drama is heard the clash of inner motives. We see one man stirred by influences which do not appeal to another.

About the same time too a second influence appeared in England emphasizing still more strongly the worth of the personal life. A new religious spirit was abroad. We have seen how the Lollards under Wiclif shook the kingdom in the age of Chaucer. More penetrating still was the influence of Puritanism. We must not think of this as the doctrine of a group of sectaries, split from the Established Church. At this time it affected the whole body of the people, appealing to men about in proportion as they were persons of large mind and devout spirit. The essence of Puritanism is this: it insists on the presence of the individual soul before its maker. To God alone I am responsible; to no one else. To the state? It is something external. My neighbor's welfare? Not primarily. Each is accountable for his own soul. By what I am in myself I stand or fall.

Now, certainly religion was not born with Puritanism, nor has it ever been confined to

these limits. The Catholic Church in England was for ages the guardian of duty, devoutness, and learning. In Spenser we see how large a portion of the field of religion may be included within Protestant, but not Puritan, bounds. Spenser felt allegiance to the Queen, to his country, to chivalry, to his own honor. But has he ever expressed a sense of his personal tie with God? No, for him religion was not so much an individual as a social affair, expressing the union of all God's people in common endeavors, in arduous and beautiful aims. The Puritan conceives something different from this and something more fundamental, however one-sided. His is a personal religion. He hears a call of God within his own soul. It is a strangely paradoxical call, for it summons us to lay aside our own will and let the will of God possess us. We are incomprehensibly to lose ourselves in Him. Yet only by doing so do we realize ourselves. When one first hears of that arrest of the individual will which Puritanism demands one might naturally suppose the Puritans would be a feeble folk, lacking in the energy necessary for practical life. Cromwell's Ironsides refute that fancy. The subordination of the individual will puts one on the path of

power. When I reflect on what I am, I see that I am I only in so far as I go forth to join what is beyond me. Then I become somewhat; otherwise, my life is fragmentary and feeble. Evidently then love and religion are hardly to be distinguished. Just as the lover wishes to empty himself of all that is his and merge himself fully with the loved one, so the soul in the presence of God, feeling its smallness, seeks to detach itself from its own will and fill itself with the will of God. Religion is only love on a large scale.

If comprehending these matters of inward experience is difficult for ourselves, how greatly the difficulty is increased when we try to express them to others. Each of us is a unique personality. What is going on in me now is going on in none of my readers, probably has never gone on before. Could I then report my present mood with exactitude, it would not repeat itself in my reader's mind. To understand it, he would need to depart from his own experience and enter imaginatively into another life. No wonder then the psychological poets are thought to express themselves darkly. Their task is a far harder one than that of those whose graceful verse offers a general beauty

to all who read. These men would get the mood of their unique souls transferred with utmost precision to other minds. But love and religion, their themes, are not fitted for such transfer. They are specific, individual, incapable of common report. To accomplish anything one must use comparisons, find analogies and, searching through all the world, piece out one partial illustration by another. He who would comprehend such verse must indeed be of an energetic temper.

Naturally, then, a new attitude is taken by these psychological poets toward the intellect. We have seen how slight is Spenser's intellectual appeal. He would hypnotize us, throw us into a condition where we cease to think and are merely lulled into some general mood as appropriate to one man as to another. With him poetry goes far toward music, becoming inarticulate, unindividual. Donne and his followers revolt against all this. They are stout individualists and delight in snubbing this mystical view of verse with harsh sounds and crabbed intellectualities. They delight in thinking and force us to think. Novelty, freshness, surprise — yes, difficulty itself — is valued by the psychological poet. He wanders far

in search of strange means for interpreting his strange soul.

Such is the new type of poetry, a poetry of the inner life, veracious, intellectual, individualistic, energetic. By it an important range of emotion is opened to English expression which had hitherto passed unobserved. Rightly too does it choose its means and set them in antithesis to those of Spenser. His "linked sweetness long drawn out" it puts away. Music is felt to be dangerous. The new verse is rugged and jarring. Instead of Spenser's inwoven sentence, knitted together with antique words and perfumed with magical associations, it uses a rough language of hints, ejaculations and irregular constructions, where words of the day are brought into service, though often with novel meanings. A poem seems intended rather for the writer than the reader. Force is sought, not elegance. Precision is prized, but ingenuity also. If we attempt to run rapidly through half a dozen lines, some intellectual puzzle is pretty sure to block our way. Alliteration and tone color are not much regarded. They are sensuous affairs, useful chiefly for impressing a reader. Puns, conceits, far fetched relationships of thought, unusual metres, indicate the

alertness of the writer's mind. And these characteristics of the metaphysical poets are by no means accidental. They spring directly from their realistic individual aim.

Who are these men? Donne, Herbert, Vaughan, Crashaw, Quarles, Traherne, perhaps Cowley. Each one of them varies the characteristics I have named, emphasizing some, subordinating others; but all, according to their several aptitudes, join in developing a type of poetry which ever since has been among the precious possessions of our literature and has been reproduced in almost every age.

If I were quite free in bringing this new poetry before my readers, I should naturally choose John Donne as its representative. He is the originator of the school and its greatest genius. Through all its members we trace his influence. But I turn from him to his pupil, George Herbert, for two reasons: first, the personal one, that, bearing Herbert's name, I have had him as a companion throughout my life and have studied him elaborately; and secondly, that I despair of making Donne intelligible within any brief compass. He is probably the most difficult writer in the English language. All the perplexing tendencies of

his group he shows in extreme form. His strange verses were not made to be listened to or hastily caught from an interpreter. They require at least three readings before they can be understood. To get their intimate charm we must brood over them, and even commit them to memory. Herbert's nature is less complicated and the range of his verse narrower. It deals exclusively with religious love and attacks the lower outbursts of passion so frequent in Donne. In one respect he differs from all the other members of his group. He is a conscious artist and has a strong sense of orderly poetic form. His small body of verse he revised continually, in order to bring it to that beauty which he loved and which he felt its subject to demand. Yet, notwithstanding superior technical excellence, he fully represents most of the tendencies of the metaphysical school. He has their aggressive intellectualism, their audacity of diction, their absorption in the inner life, thorough-going individualism, wide-ranging allusion, candor, exactitude, and tenderness. With Donne his relations were close. A personal connection between them had been formed while Herbert was a mere boy, and the influence of the older

man attended Herbert throughout life. If we knew of no personal contact of the two, but, being acquainted with Donne's verse should open a volume of Herbert's, we should at once recognize the master's guiding hand. I select then the more readily accessible Herbert as my representative of this type.

His life ran from 1593 to 1633; that is, he was born almost exactly a century after the discovery of America. His period is probably the most markedly transitional in all English poetry: he being born as the first Books of "The Faerie Queene" appeared, when Shakspere was writing his poems and earliest plays, and dying in the year when Dryden, Locke, and Spinoza were born. The brief span of his life, that is, extends from the days of the highest romance our literature ever knew to the beginning of the era of common sense. His, too, was a contentious time. Individualism was coming in like a flood and pushing aside the earlier chivalric collectivism. The Puritan ascendancy was gaining every year and deeply affecting literature.

We are apt to think of Herbert as an aged saint, who spent a lifetime in the courts of the Lord, and came to find every worldly thought

repulsive. This absurd estimate has largely been induced by Walton's charming romance. Biography was at that time in its infancy, and the few examples of it that occur aim at eulogy and stimulus rather than description. To comprehend the man Herbert, all these romantic notions must be dismissed. He died comparatively young, just under forty. Most of his life was spent in courts, universities, and among the most eminent and fashionable of his time. During only three years was he a priest. Unfortunately the romantic view of him has gained currency, too, through an adjective which early became attached to his name, "*holy* George Herbert." That is exactly what Herbert was not. A holy man is a whole man, one who is altogether in harmony with himself and God. Herbert's was a divided nature. Opposing impulses tore him. It is these which bring him near to us and make him a true representative of psychological poetry. When he was dying, he handed over the meagre roll of his poems to a friend — for none were published during his life. All are private poems, stamped with that genuine sincerity which can be had only in writings not intended for the public eye — and said, "Here is a record

of the many spiritual conflicts that have passed betwixt God and my soul. Let my friend Mr. Ferrar read it; and then if he can think it may turn to the advantage of any dejected poor soul, let it be made public; if not, let him burn it." Mr. Ferrar fortunately published it immediately, and it so exactly hit the taste of its time that a dozen editions were called for in half a century. We shall do it and its author much injustice if we withdraw our attention from those "Conflicts."

The life of Herbert is most significantly divided into four periods: that of education, of hesitation, of crisis, and of consecration. The period of education covers the first twenty-six years of his life, from his birth in 1593 to his acceptance of the Oratorship at Cambridge in 1619. The second, the period of hesitation, covers his Oratorship; that is, eight years, up to the death of his mother in 1627. A crisis period follows, in which Herbert was surveying himself and asking whether his life was to be wasted. This continued for three years, from 1627 to 1630. Then comes at last the glorious period of his consecration, his period as a priest. Obviously these periods are very unequal, yet each makes its special contribution to our understanding of him.

His family was one of the noblest in England. Three earldoms were in it, the head of the whole clan being that William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, who was one of the most influential nobles at the close of the reign of Elizabeth and during the reign of James. Herbert always prided himself on his aristocratic birth. The exquisite gentleman appears in him everywhere, both for strength and weakness. His father, belonging to the branch of the Herbert family which lived at Montgomery Castle in Wales, died when George was but four years old, and Lady Herbert became both father and mother to him. She was one of the masterful women of that age and one of the most admired. A dozen years after the death of her husband, though she had already ten children, she married Sir John Danvers, a man twenty years her junior. Nor was the marriage unhappy. Sir John Danvers was accordingly the only father Herbert ever knew, except his spiritual father, Donne. Donne and his large family had been assisted by Lady Herbert at a critical period of his life. Gratitude and kindred tastes drew him to her subsequently, and at least three poems of his addressed to her have come down to us. Her

poetic son thus early felt Donne's influence. To George Herbert Donne bequeathed his seal ring.

Herbert's position in life put him in the way of meeting many others who were then eminent in literature and the State. William Herbert, the head of his house, has been believed by many to be the mysterious "Mr. W. H." to whom Shakspere's Sonnets are inscribed. Certainly it is to him that the first folio of Shakspere's plays is dedicated. Possibly, therefore, Herbert may have seen Shakspere. While he was Orator at the University Milton was a student there. When Lord Bacon in 1625 published certain Psalms which he had translated into verse, he dedicated them to Herbert as the first of his time "in respect of divinity and poesy met."

Leaving Westminster School in London in 1610, Herbert entered Trinity College, Cambridge. The same year, he being at the time seventeen, he addressed two sonnets to his mother which are of extreme significance. In them and an accompanying letter he lays down a programme for his life. He will become a poet, a poet of love. That is the only worthy theme, he declares. But he will be nothing like the fashionable poets. They have de-

graded the sacred passion, "parcelling it out" to one and another person. That is to empty love of all meaning. The only way in which it can be understood is to view it in full scale, drawing God and the human soul together. Herbert will therefore write nothing but religious verse and so will manifest love unlimited. With this purpose Herbert went up to the University. To that purpose he remained true, becoming — if we except Robert Southwell — our first purely religious poet.

One other aim Herbert had for shaping his life, and long was the shaping deferred. From birth he was physically weak, with a tendency to consumption. His brothers were martial men, and this was the general inheritance of the family. His eldest brother, Edward, was that Lord Herbert of Cherbury, the founder of English deism, the eccentric soldier, ambassador, duellist, egotist, who wrote one of the most entertaining of autobiographies. Two other brothers were officers in the army and navy; Henry, nearest in age to George, and perhaps his favorite, was Master of Revels at the Court. One born in such station found few employments open. He could not engage in trade. He must enter either the army, the

Church, or the Civil Service. Herbert's mother early saw that he was of too feeble a frame to serve in the army or probably in the State. She dedicated him, therefore, to the Church. Herbert accepted the proposed career without question, and soon an association of ideas became fixed in his mind, uniting the thought of being a priest with that of being an upright man. Whenever secular affairs interested him, as they naturally did through most of his life, he counted himself cut off from God. Whenever higher moods were on, he was all eager for the priesthood.

He took his Bachelor's degree when he was twenty and remained at the University to study divinity. Being, however, already noted as something of a connoisseur in words, and skilled in Latin and Greek as well as English, he undertook also some teaching in rhetoric. In these pleasant employments and agreeable surroundings year by year went by and brought him no nearer to the priesthood. Finally the Oratorship of the University fell vacant. In it Herbert saw something much to his liking. He aspired to it. Fortunately we have a letter from him replying to a question a friend had asked, whether the Oratorship was quite com-

patible with aiming at the priesthood. He thinks it is, for it only defers that purpose a little; and besides, the Oratorship is the finest post in the University. The Orator sits above everybody at table, receives all distinguished visitors, writes the letters of the University, and has in addition a very pretty salary.

He received the appointment in 1619 and held the office for eight years. The suspended section of Herbert's life which follows I have called his period of hesitation. In it his double-mindedness is striking. Certainly he will be a priest. He has never intended anything else, a priest and a poet. But hurry? Why should one hasten such a career? There are many good things by the way. Even Walton records that during his oratorship "he was seldom at Cambridge unless the King was there, and then he never missed." Herbert loves stately ceremonials, fine clothes and manners, whatever of beauty the world can show. That is one side of him. He is a man of the Renaissance, sensitive to all the glories of earth and exulting in them. But there is another side, just as genuine. When we notice the strength of one of these two sides of Herbert, we are apt to imagine the other feeble or unreal. That is not the

case. It is to misunderstand Herbert as a man, and quite to miss the type of his poetry of the inner life, if we fail to give credit to discordant elements in him. His purpose of allegiance to God, taking the form of entering the priesthood, is a positive passion, however long he loiters by the way.

In 1625 King James died. Herbert had hoped to climb, like the preceding Orator, into some public office. He dreamed of becoming Assistant Secretary of State. The King's death destroyed these hopes. A year later Bacon died. Worse still, in 1627 died that mother who had never ceased to guide him, who had fixed the plan of his life, and had not seen that plan fulfilled. Herbert was overwhelmed. His health was poor at the time, and mental conflicts made it worse. He resigned the Oratorship, left the University where he had lived for seventeen years, retired to his brother Henry's country home, and there passed through what I have called his "crisis."

A record of this crisis he has left us. Life was slipping away, with nothing accomplished. How was it all to end? In a single section of my edition of his poems I have brought together the pathetic group of those that paint this

struggle. We hear him now expressing delight in the world and asking how he can possibly leave it, now pouring forth eager longings to be fully a child of God, now doubting his fitness for that exalted life. After two or three years of this self-scrutiny, search for health, and efforts to reinstate his early resolve, he met Jane Danvers and married her, Walton says, three days after their first meeting. I question the tale, for she was a near relative of Herbert's stepfather and lived but a few miles from his brother's house. Yet even if the story is inexact, it well illustrates Herbert's headlong temper. He says himself that people "think me eager, hot, and undertaking. But in my prosecutions slack and small." We may perhaps say that he was of so hesitating a disposition, so prone to delay, that finally he would act on some small impulse, and suddenly important issues would be closed. It was in this way that at last he entered the priesthood. The Earl of Pembroke invited him to Wilton House to meet Archbishop Laud, who was at the time a visitor there. Laud remonstrated with him over his long delay. Walton says Herbert sent for a tailor the next day and was measured for his canonical clothes.

Herbert entered the priesthood in 1630, at the age of thirty-seven, and spent in it the last three years of his brief life. At first he found great happiness in it. He had at length made a reality of a lifelong dream. There could be no more discontent. He might now possess a united mind. But the little parish which the Earl of Pembroke gave him at Bemerton, between Wilton and Salisbury, contained only a hundred and twenty people, men, women and children. For many years Herbert had been living in the full tide of the bustling world, with the most intellectual men of that world as his companions. Now he found himself shut up to a small group of illiterate rustics. He tried to develop all the possibilities of his office, and in his beautiful notebook, "A Priest to the Temple," has left an elaborate study of what the country parson can do and be. He kept his intellectual interests alive with this book, with writing far more verse than formerly, and with frequent visits to the organ in Salisbury Cathedral. But after all, he could not help wondering whether such a life was what God and he had intended. This disposition to doubt was much increased as consumption pressed him harder. Of this disease he died in

1633. Had he died three years earlier, we should never have known him, or at most should have found his name mentioned somewhere as that of an elegant dilettante from whom contemporaries expected much, but who left only a dozen or more Latin and Greek pieces of slender merit and a few English verses on ecclesiastical subjects. It is chiefly Bemerton with its enforced loneliness, questionings, revolts, and visions of completed love which made Herbert an example of all that is best in the metaphysical poetry of the inner life. In three poems — the long "Affliction," "Love Unknown," and "The Pilgrimage" — Herbert traces at different periods the course of his infirm and disappointed life. The shortest of them, and perhaps the obscurest, written near its end, is the most fully confessional and poignant.

It will be seen how truly such a divided and introspective life typifies the age which produced it. Donne and his followers are no accident. They sum up in artistic form the questioning tendencies of their time. In few other periods of English history has the English people believed, acted, enjoyed and aspired so nearly like a single person as during the first

three quarters of the reign of Elizabeth. Foreign dangers welded the nation together. The Queen, her great ministers, and the historical plays of Shakspere, set forth its ideals of orderly government. Spenser's poem consummated its ideals of orderly beauty, as did Hooker's "Ecclesiastical Polity" those of an orderly Church. Men in those days marched together. Dissenters, either of a religious, political, or artistic sort, were few and despised. But with the Stuart line a change, long preparing, manifested itself. In science, Bacon questioned established authority and sent men to nature to observe for themselves. In government, the King's prerogative was questioned, and Parliament became so rebellious that they were often dismissed. A revolution in poetic taste was under way. Spenser's smooth strains and bloodless heroes were being replaced by the jolting and passionate realism of Donne. The field of human interest, in short, was becoming more and more an internal one; the individual soul and its analysis calling for much attention from its anxious possessor.

In choosing Herbert to represent this introspective poetry we must acknowledge that he stands outside his school in one important

respect, in orderliness and brevity. No other member of his group has his artistic feeling. Their poems are usually a tangled growth, developed rather to ease the unrest of the writer than to convey objects of beauty to a reader. Some promising situation attracts the poet's attention and he begins to write, wandering wherever thought or a good phrase leads, playing about his subject till he and his readers have had enough. Beginning anywhere, he ends nowhere. Where, too, no plan controls, there is likely to be excessive length. From such formless composition Herbert turns away. All his work has structural unity. He knows when to stop. Each poem presents a single mood, relation, or problem of divine love, and ends with its clear exposition. His poems are at once short and adequate. Out of his hundred and sixty-nine nearly a hundred have less than twenty-five lines each; only four exceed one hundred and fifty. Within these narrow bounds the theme is fully and economically developed. We feel it is not he who directs its course; he is merely responsive to the shaping subject. Accordingly any set of Herbert's verses conveys such singleness of impression as is rarely found among his contemporaries.

But while he thus lacks one common, though undesirable, trait of his school, he may well serve as its representative. Like the rest of them, he fixes his gaze on himself alone and introspects the working of a single soul. Like them he finds complications and paradoxes there and amuses himself with them, while still retaining our belief in his sincerity and earnestness. With him as with them energetic and unusual thought is a delight, and nothing pleases him more than to stuff words with a little more meaning than they can bear. And like them he surprises his reader with sudden turns of sweet and tender simplicity, imbedded in a crabbed context.

In technical matters, too, he is substantially in accord with them. While all his lines are rhymed, he employs imperfect rhymes freely, alliteration and vowel color rarely. His working foot is the iambic, in which rhythm all but eleven of his poems are written, these eleven being trochaic. He has no blank verse, Alexandrine, or "fourteener." He has seventeen sonnets, but confines himself to the Shaksperean form or to one peculiar to himself. He does not use Spenser's stanza nor Chaucer's Rhyme Royal. His feeling for the texture of a

line is much finer than that of his master, of whom Ben Jonson said to Drummond that "for not keeping of accent Donne deserved hanging." For each lyrical situation he invents exactly the rhythmic setting which befits it. Each set of emotions he clothes in individual garb, and only when what is beneath is similar is the same clothing used a second time. One hundred and sixteen of his poems are written in metres which are not repeated. In his verse matter and form are bound together with exceptional closeness.

So much has been said in this chapter about Herbert as a poet of the personal life and of his agreement with his group in analyzing individual experience, that perhaps in closing a few words of caution are needed. These subtle longings, dejections, and vacillations of the lover of God, like similar moods reported by the poets of human love, are not mere statements of autobiographic fact. Undoubtedly they start with fact, and how large is the measure of that fact in Herbert's verse I have shown in my account of his life. But though seven eighths of his poems employ the word "I," they do not confine themselves to personal record. What Herbert gives us of inner

experience, no less than what Chaucer gave of outer, is colored by the temperament through which it passes. Starting with a veritable fact, Herbert allows this to dictate congenial circumstances, to color all details with its influence, to eliminate the belittlements of reality, and so to exhibit an emotional completeness which may not have been found in his actual life. This is the work of the artist everywhere, to idealize reality. Herbert thus idealizes. But he is no mere sentimentalist, living in shifting feelings, and fancying that to-day God has withdrawn his love from him whom he yesterday favored. Nor yet are the poems fictitious which so declare him. Herbert's own experience warrants fears which he knows are not peculiar to himself. They belong to love everywhere. In them he finds subjects of sad pleasure which his empty days, disciplined mind, and artistic skill fashioned into forms of permanent beauty.

SUGGESTIONS FOR READING

Herbert's two sonnets to his mother, showing in their style the strong influence of Donne and announcing his resolve to devote himself to religious love-poetry, are quoted by Walton in his "Life" of Herbert, and I have included them in my edition of Herbert's Works.

Herbert's ability to pack much matter into few words and, like his friend Bacon, to coin proverbial sayings, may be seen in any stanza of "The Church Porch."

His piety utters itself in such poems as "The Elixer," "Clasping of Hands," "The Pearl," "The Glance," "The Second Jordan."

"Aaron," "The Priesthood," "An Offering," "Paradise," "Gratefulness" "Love," show the attractions of the priesthood.

One sees his divided mind in the long "Affliction," "The Collar," "The Answer," "The Second Temper," "Submission," "The Flower."

Poems of power, which well illustrate the style and the man, are "Sunday," "Constancie," "Man," "Virtue," "Sinne," "The Method," "The Forerunners."

Good examples of his playful intellectualism are "The Pulley," "Peace," "Sinnes Round," "A Wreath," "Mortification."

V

Alexander Pope

V

ALEXANDER POPE

In speaking of the different philosophical attitudes of John Stuart Mill and Frederic Denison Maurice, an acute English critic once said that whenever a new idea was presented to Mill his immediate question was, Is it true? When presented to Maurice, his was, What does it mean? The second of these inquiries was on the whole, the critic thought, the more profound. A somewhat similar question attends the devotee of poetry. Approaching poetry in our youth, we are contented to ask, "Do I like it, does it accord with my present modes of feeling, do I find in it a reflection of my own face?" But soon such interest is discovered to be sentimental and enfeebling. As we grow older, we either discard poetry altogether or we approach it from a different side; that is, we now ask, what does it signify, what phase of human nature finds expression here? All the better if it is some phase which as yet has not been fully developed in ourselves. The important work of poetry is to broaden our

sympathies, to enlarge our imagination, to lead us to view humanity in the total extent of its range. I hope this book may impel its readers in these energetic directions. Already my demands have been considerable. We have found poetry reflecting the outer world. We have looked upon it as a dreamland, closely associated with music. We have seen it as introspection, the individual soul standing solitary before its Maker endeavoring to comprehend its varying moods as it now approaches and now falls away from its mighty love. Many of my readers will find it difficult to conceive religion in the fervently individualistic way in which Herbert exhibits it.

In this chapter we consider a poet still farther removed from our natural sympathies. Here, I congratulate myself, my reader will be forced to exercise his imagination in a field he instinctively dislikes. In most of us, at least, Pope meets a strong adverse prejudice. We know that he was once a mighty sovereign, but believe that long ago he was rightly dethroned and proved to be the wearer of a tinsel crown. To-day he is out of fashion; and while his pregnant sentences still serve as proverbs, few think of reading him. He accordingly offers

the best of opportunities for the exercise of that imagination on which I have been insisting. Let my readers try to bring themselves into the strange and somewhat repellent conditions under which Pope wrote.

I will not call Pope one of the greatest of poets, but he is an essential one. Modern poetry could not have come into existence until he had shown us a section of what its work was to be. Call it but a section, say that much of it is trivial, still it is important. We cannot comprehend how the later poetry is derived from the earlier unless we have comprehended his.

How, then, can we bring ourselves into a cordial attitude toward a writer at once so necessary yet so frequently distasteful? I believe we shall do it best by giving clear utterance to the half-conscious hostile thoughts which are in the minds of most of us. In order to set Pope on high, as ultimately I hope to do, I will for the moment attempt to pull him down. I will indicate at least where his shortcomings lie. For these are grave and so obtrusive that until we have put them out of the way we can hardly perceive his merits.

In disparaging Pope, then, let me first call attention to the narrow range of his subjects. His sympathies are meagre and do not extend to outward nature. One of his longer poems is entitled "Windsor Forest," and in that forest Pope grew up. Binfield, his home, is only a few miles distant from the village which inspired Milton's "Allegro" and "Penseroso." But Pope is occupied in Windsor Forest less with trees than with men. Wordsworth thought there were one or two adjectives in the poem which show that Pope had had his eye on a natural object. But the poem is a human document, as are all Pope's. This need be no disparagement. Pope is essentially a humanist, and a humanist is nothing in itself disgraceful. But Pope's interest in men — men and women — hardly extends beyond that of a single time and place; the London of his day. Never in his life was he a hundred miles away from London, and all his thought is bounded by its streets. Even within it he regards only a section of its people. Of the so-called lower classes he never speaks. His concern is entirely with two small groups, the courtiers or politicians, and the literary men, the two classes in every community most artificial and remote from

common life. And even in his dealings with these we must reduce his scope still more; for it is not their elemental passions which he shows, but rather their manners, spites, and superficialities. Nowhere in Pope do we find the profound hopes, loves, longings, and despairs which Herbert offers. These are cast away as unfit for verse. The outside of people, persons as they appear at an evening party, make up the stuff of his pages.

In all his writing, too, a certain lack of originality is generally felt. Independent intellectual grasp we do not find. He is ever leaning on others. In early life it is Trumbull, Wycherley, Walsh, to whom he looks and whom he makes his guides. In his middle period it is Swift. In his later and greatest time he is in close intellectual dependence on Bolingbroke. During the last half-dozen years of his life, he formed a less worthy connection and Warburton controls. He must always see himself through the eyes of somebody else and, perhaps by consequence, has little freshness of vision. The substance of his poetry is commonplace and rarely discloses any such insight into life as makes us aware of what we are and whither the world is tending. Pope's thoughts

are our own, merely given back to us in more polished form.

In estimating, too, the degree of Pope's dependence on others one must remember how all his life was spent under the shadow of Dryden. Dryden had been the literary dictator of the previous generation, and to rival him in each of his many styles was the perpetual ambition of Pope. Dryden modernized Chaucer; so did Pope. Dryden translated Virgil; Pope, Homer. Dryden criticized tragedy; Pope poetry in general. Dryden gave us the portrait of Eleonora and Mrs. Killigrew; Pope that of an Unfortunate Lady and Eloisa. Dryden wrote a long theological plea for Protestantism and later one for Catholicism; Pope, one no less long in defence of optimistic Deism. Dryden satirized MacFlecknoe; Pope, Cibber and Theobald. Dryden sang of Alexander's Feast; Pope, of St. Cecilia's Day. Once Pope ventured, in collaboration with Gay, on writing a play, for which he was singularly unfit. Both he and Dryden, though Catholics, aspired to the very first place in the literature of a Protestant land, and the standard verse-form of both is the heroic couplet, developed into its highest unity by Pope. There is a legend that Pope in

his earlier years was taken to view the great Dryden, sitting enthroned in Will's Coffee House. At any rate, Dryden's robust hand never left the stooping shoulders of his sensitive little successor.

But we must not omit one further limitation of Pope's poetry which holds back many of his readers, his lack of continuity and his monotony. Both connect themselves with the use of that poetic instrument of which I was just speaking, the closed couplet or ten-syllabled iambic stanza. This is the music to which nine tenths of his poetry is set, and it is the music of the bagpipes or accordion. Remember how almost every poem of Herbert's had its special measure, one springing from its subject, and then consider the almost mechanical form imposed on pretty much everything Pope offers us. No wonder we find such pages monotonous and after reading three or four of them lose something of our hold on the meaning. The brief little sections easily fall apart. No English measure has less staying power, and Pope's couplets are beyond all others in lack of coherence. He straps together bundles of them into connected poems; any one of these poems, say the "Essay on Criticism," might about as well

be read backwards as forwards. Usually if we study a poem of Pope's sufficiently, we can find a kind of plan in it; but that plan is not tight and obligatory. The couplets, each exquisite in itself, straggle out upon the page about as disjointedly as they first struck the mind of the writer.

These are grave indictments. When we have judged a poet to be petty in subject, commonplace in thought, loose and monotonous in treatment, we have left small room for merits. Yet I believe I have not exaggerated nor said anything novel. Whoever has read Pope at all has felt these faults.

But besides objections to Pope's art, others are justly brought against his character. Unpleasing personal peculiarities obtrude themselves through all his writings. He is the vainest of English poets, continually talking about himself. Not content with giving us abundant autobiographical details, he insists that these show him to be a marvel of virtue and superior to every one else. Such talk is tiresome. At first we excuse it by supposing that in such passages Pope may be presenting ideals of what he would be rather than statements of what he thinks he is. But when we look up the

records of his life we find that vanity filled it with envy, hatred, and all uncharitableness. His years and writings abound in quarrels. Many of the persons assailed we do not otherwise know, and they may be said to have acquired a certain sort of immortality by his very attack. But we at least know enough of his feuds to be sure that most of them were unnecessary and that a character so ready to take offence had serious flaws.

Probably, too, most persons will feel a certain insincerity in the verse and will call it artificial, if nothing worse. It is striking that about in proportion as English poetry becomes clear and simple, it becomes doubtfully sincere. Nobody questions the veracity of Donne and his followers. If we should take Herbert aside and say what a puzzling phrase that was "in your poem on Man. Did you mean it?" would he not answer, "Yes, and I am sorry that in order to state my meaning exactly, I was obliged to be a trifle obscure." The metaphysical poets, in short, do not write for display, but for relief of their own minds. This cannot be said of the Queen-Anne's Men. While it is their special office to rationalize poetry and convey clear thought which may be read with

ease, they seldom escape the suspicion of ostentatious performance, Pope least of all. The critical studies of Dilke, Elwin, and others have shown conclusively that Pope's statements about himself cannot be trusted. He claims a nobler ancestry than he had; dates his poems earlier than they were written, in order to seem precocious; and when he would publish his letters, and yet is half ashamed to do so, he resorts to elaborate intrigue, pretending that others are surreptitiously publishing and so he is obliged to put them out himself. Collecting letters from his many correspondents, he improves their quality by rewriting, changes their dates and sometimes their addresses, referring them to a different person from the one to whom they were sent. Then he issues them as veritable originals. Pope's mind was tortuous. In his own time it was well said of him that he could not drink a cup of tea without a stratagem.

This is the man for whom I now ask admiration. While I believe all I have said in his dispraise is true, I would also recall the warning of an earlier chapter: we must not base our judgment of a poet on what is not in him, but on what is. When we turn our attention away

from the defects of Pope and fix it on his positive merits, we quickly see how precious has been his contribution to our verse. This is De Quincey's estimate: "Alexander Pope, the most brilliant of all wits who have at any period applied themselves to the poetic treatment of human manners, to the selecting from the play of human character what is picturesque, or the arresting what is fugitive." Byron calls Pope "a poet of a thousand years," and many of us are under such obligations to him that we believe he will have a rightful eminence so long as the English language endures. Let me acknowledge my own debt. My grandfather had a good copy of his poems. So while still a boy and knowing little of Pope's repute, I fell to reading that volume. It fascinated me. I turned to it again and again until I had absorbed it into my very structure, where it has remained a blessing through all subsequent years. But how can all this be? How can one so repellent to many in work and character excite also such enthusiasm? To solve the paradox we must turn from his weaknesses and consider his strengths, at the same time keeping clearly in mind the type of English poetry for which he stands.

Yet before fixing that type, I suppose I must in some degree clear his character; for so long as he is morally objectionable, his poetic worth is likely to be granted grudgingly. My first claim for him then shall be that he showed a marvellous heroism in accepting his limitations. We all have these. Each knows well how firmly some circumstance hems him in, cutting him off from doing what he would. With one of us it is bad health, with one poverty, with one lack of early training or — worse — just native dullness. Whatever form it takes, it hedges us about and prevents the full pattern which we feel within us from coming out. Thus we become soured and rebellious. Looking at myself in comparison with others, I feel that the Creator has not been fair. Had he given me such chances as that other man has, I certainly should have used them wisely, winning happiness for myself and blessing for humanity. Now I am small, and my littleness is not my fault. So most of us say when limitations press. Some of the wiser sort accept the facts quietly, go about their daily work dutifully, and try to be cheerful in spite of disadvantages. Occasionally a Stevenson thrills the world by showing how a man may in himself be superior to

fate and defy misfortune. But of all the men I know, Pope, I think, met his limitations best, better even than Stevenson; for in Stevenson there is always something of the Stoic. He knows how bad his conditions are, but will not let them crush him. Magnificent! Yet Pope shows a wisdom higher still; he turns his very limitations into sources of power. It seems incredible that this can be done, especially where limitations are so enormous as those which beset Pope.

He was the only son of a London linen-merchant who by middle life had acquired a fair competence — not a fortune, but a competence — and so retired from business, moved out a little way from London, and took a house at Binfield, in the forest adjoining Windsor. The boy was born of parents already advanced in years — the mother forty-eight — and born a cripple. There was curvature of the spine and with it came subsequently almost every ailment that flesh is heir to. His face, notwithstanding the brilliant eye, showed marks of constant pain. Headaches were frequent and prevented his working for any long connected time. There was a disposition to asthma, and nervous disease in all its distressing forms was

on him from childhood, much intensified by the severe studies of his youth. His distorted figure never attained a height of more than four feet.

What prospect in life was there for such a crippled child? Of course any active employment was out of the question. Only one career lay open, a life with books. He might become a scholar, or rather a scholar at intervals. Persistence might bring learning even if continuous study was impossible. But here the barbarous laws of his country intervened. His parents were Catholics, and Pope himself was intensely loyal. His nature was not a religious one. He cared little for doctrine. To be a Protestant would have been throughout life greatly to his interest, and not much against his inclination. But it was not in him to desert an oppressed cause, nor would he put a barrier between himself and those he loved. In consequence he was shut out from all the great schools and universities of his country. Why not, then, join those of the Continent? He was too frail. His health would not permit it. For the same reason, too, he was cut off from that which for many men well supplies the loss of university training, travel. No, Pope was

hemmed in. Both nature and man forbade him opportunities. Most men finding themselves in such a case would think they did well if they amused themselves with books and talk from day to day without bringing discomfort on others. Who of us would have set a conscious task before ourselves, one, too, so difficult that in it the best equipped seldom succeed, and then by the time we were twenty-one have arrived at acknowledged eminence? That is what Pope did. Obscure in birth, feeble in frame, forbidden education, before he is twelve he resolves that the world shall hear him and so compensate for that which he afterwards called "this long disease, my life." He did not let his limitations fret him into idleness, but used them as helps, indications of the paths through which he might reach power. Of course under such difficulties he must systematically manage himself, think all out beforehand, and make up with brain what was lacking in physical advantage. His is a veritable dedication of himself to poetry.

He consulted friends to learn what portion of the poetic field was as yet unoccupied, and fortunately got from the admirable critic Walsh a magic word. Walsh told him that

English poetry had accomplished pretty much everything else except "correctness." Whoever could introduce that would find a place. We need not puzzle ourselves over the precise meaning of the word. Enough that, remembering how at some lucky moment a golden saying has enriched our life, we perceive that correctness must at least have suggested the idea of correcting. The metaphysical poets, the men of Donne's school, poured forth in profusion whatever came into their heads, regardless for the most part of lucidity, order or rule. Herbert is about the only one among them who revised his text, and he did not do it in the interest of clearness. Little they cared whether they were comprehended. Their first thoughts were their only ones. But lasting literature is best built out of second thoughts. If after setting down what in our first heat we think we have to say, we go over and correct it subsequently, we may reach what Wordsworth demanded of poetry, "emotion recalled in tranquillity." Walsh was right in saying there had been little of this hitherto in English verse, and to it the eager boy at once addressed himself. By the time he was twelve Pope had produced a little masterpiece in his lines on

"The Quiet Life"; a translation of Horace's "Beatus ille":

"Happy the man whose wish and care
A few paternal acres bound,
Content to breathe his native air,
In his own ground.

Whose herds with milk, whose fields with bread,
Whose flocks supply him with attire,
Whose trees in summer yield him shade
In winter fire.

Blest who can unconcernedly find
Hours, days, and years slide soft away,
In health of body, peace of mind,
Quiet by day,

Sound sleep by night, study and ease
Together mixed, sweet recreation,
And innocence, which most does please
With meditation.

Thus let me live, unseen, unknown
Thus unlamented let me die,
Steal from the world, and not a stone
Tell where I lie."

That could hardly be improved, either in sense or sound. Let any one try to change a word, and he will discover how near its simplicity comes to perfection. Each line takes just the course it must take; and yet there is

good reason to believe it was written in Pope's twelfth year. Of course he retouched it later, as he did all his writing. But here it stands, an early proof that Pope could accomplish his aim in spite of his limitations — yes, by their aid.

Soon recognizing, too, that continuous intellectual labor was impossible for him, instead of rebelling he turned to that which may well be discontinuous. The couplet is the form of English verse which can best be taken up piecemeal and by piecemeal polished. Pope devoted himself to it. He distributed scraps of paper about his house, had bits even at his bedside — for his sleep was never more than intermittent — and whenever a clever couplet occurred to him, down it went on paper. These papers were then gathered, the coherences among them noted, and they were gradually fashioned into a poem. There is something pathetic in what I urged a while ago to his disparagement, that most of his poems are not closely knit. Nature forbade that. But Pope, instead of resenting it, made fragments to shine. He carried the closed couplet to the utmost point of refinement it was ever to reach in England. He regarded it as a veritable stanza and accordingly thought

that, as in any stanza, the sense should be tolerably complete within its bounds. Already this tendency to shut up the couplet within itself had appeared in Dryden and Waller; but it is Pope who gave that final touch which made the couplet really adequate to itself. In compacting it thus, he clearly understood the dangers it would meet. The verse might easily become monotonous, just one repeated beat. But what subtlety he has used for avoiding this! Reading his verses carelessly, we often fail to notice how neatly he has shifted his pause — the pause, I mean, midway in the line, the cæsura — sometimes drawing it nearer the beginning, sometimes delaying it till toward the end, readjusting it with every refinement so that successive lines may not be too similar. In this way he introduces a delicate music into his verse and brings out all the limited capacity of the closed couplet.

No wonder that such a man who in early life saw so clearly the literary tendencies of his age, soon attracted the attention of notable men of letters. He speedily became recognized as the prince of them all. This cripple, this tradesman's son, this youth hampered by feeble health and fragmentary education,

makes English literary and political life bow down to him as a great power. What a feat to accomplish in earliest manhood! Well might he afterwards exultingly say,

> "Yes, I am proud, I must be proud to see
> Men not afraid of God afraid of me."

If now Pope's character is partially cleared, if we see that he is entitled to respect as a man, that his energetic life has in it much which is pathetic, and stimulating to ourselves, we may perhaps be prepared to examine dispassionately the special contribution he made to our poetry. We shall best begin to do so by observing that he is our first man of pure letters, our first professional poet.

Every writer before Pope had taken poetry as a collateral employment, in connection with days devoted to something else. Chaucer, as we have seen, was a man of the court, a soldier, a foreign envoy. Spenser was one of the conquerors of Ireland. Herbert was a courtier, a teacher at the University, a country minister. These all found time for poetry also; but they did not devote themselves to it. One greater than they all attempted this, Milton. From earliest years he had consecrated himself to poetry as to a holy calling, but the exigencies

of his country combined with a faltering purpose to check him. During thirty of the middle years of his life, suspending poetic employment, Milton became a political pamphleteer and Secretary to the Commonwealth. No, it is not incorrect to say that Pope is the first among our literary men to give himself up through an entire life whole-heartedly to poetry. This is what the musician, the painter, the sculptor do as a matter of course with their exacting arts. But perhaps some of my readers will not approve such a method in poetry. They may call it artificial, think the poet had better remain something of an amateur. If he engages only in his art he may not feel the full tides of life. Probably Pope never felt them fully. Under the conditions in which he found himself it was impossible to do so. But one thing he knew well and loved ardently, pure literature, perfect expression. For this he was ready to endure hardship. And we cannot understand, certainly not enjoy, him unless we too know how difficult smooth-slipping sentences are to fashion, and so feel a corresponding pleasure wherever they appear. Before we can care for Pope we must hate all that is awkward, extravagant, or fantastic in writing, and

highly prize lucidity, ease and lightness of touch. These latter difficult excellencies we are apt to rate as subordinate or even trivial. Pope gives up a life to them with entire seriousness and consummately attains them. Of him might be said what Tennyson said of his Edmund, that "lucky rhymes to him were scrip and share, and mellow metres more than cent for cent."

Thus I am led at once to point out wherein I regard Pope as typical and why it seemed to me that in presenting half a dozen types of poetry, that is, the work of men who were really discoverers, opening to English poetry emotional tracts which before were closed, I ought to include Pope. The ideal he followed is ordinarily spoken of as the "classical ideal" and his school the "Classical School." No label is accurate. One man covered by it swings to the right, another to the left of its meaning, and much that interests Pope stands outside classicism altogether. Still, the word may guide us to his type, only we must not suppose that the English Classicists imitate Greek writers. The word has passed through France, and French standards were now becoming those of England too. Dryden had felt

their attraction. Pope felt it still more and found it still nearer akin to his own genius. For how neat the French mind is! How it abhors the "too much" and keeps itself within bounds. The ancient Greek in his inscription on Apollo's temple — μηδὲν ἄγαν "not too much" — taught respect for the limit. The finite is the field for man, not the infinite. The Gothic, Northern, or German spirit, on the contrary, aspires gropingly after the infinite. It never grasps it, of course, but we admire its mighty reach. It may be that those who restrict themselves to the finite are in danger of remaining small, but some are content to be so if only they may be precise.

Just before Pope's time the need had been felt of such sober, rational, and corrective influences as the neo-Classicists upheld. In all the countries of western Europe an era of social good sense was following one of enthusiasm and turbulent egotism. It affected politics no less than literature. Pope was born in 1688, the child of a revolution which was worked out by sensible constitutional means, following at a distance of only forty years one of the most tumultuous outbreaks which the world had at that time known. Good sense and compromise

were in Pope's blood. He led a much needed literary reaction against the disorderly writers who preceded him. The Metaphysical School had cared little for good taste, for social standards, for neat expression. Their far-fetched analogies, their wild conceits, their introspective personal gaze, their fondness for speculation and inaptitude for facts, rendered poetry almost unintelligible. English literature was overrun with a jungle growth, and some one was needed to cut paths through.

This is the work of the Classicists with their engine of rationality. The metaphysical poets are irrational. They utter merely what the moment brings and the individual feels. But reason requires social adjustment. The feeling which springs hot from the heart of the poet must be tempered to meet the conditions of a receiving mind. That social tempering is the very essence of art, a difficult business, in which, however, we are not left without aid. Through all the ages men have been studying the best modes of approach of man to man, and the results of that experience are summed up in those laws of good taste which are embodied in the work of great poets and critics of the past. These teach us how futile a being

the obscure, redundant, awkward, self-centred poet is. He has been unwilling to take trouble on himself in behalf of his neighbor. He should be socialized, rationalized. Most of the seventeenth century was a time of extreme individualism. Pope's age of reason lays insistence on social proprieties. Who will say that they were not needed?

Yet such standards of social propriety narrow in some respects the sympathies of him who adopts them. Enthusiasm, for example, is soon looked upon with suspicion, because it cannot be exactly explained nor fully shared. It isolates him who feels it, and should have consequently no place in literature, which deals with what is comprehensible by all. That sensible clarity which Addison was exhibiting in the essay and Locke in philosophy, it was the office of Pope to bring over into poetry. All three, purged of blind enthusiasm, move among such subjects and employ such language as cultivated gentlemen might use at a casual meeting. They avoid pedantry and hot emotion. They keep clear of whatever is heavy, obtrusive, or personal. Of course while using simple language, one would be glad to have his language shine. A clever epigram is always in

point. It must not sprawl or show effort, as did those of the generation before. A brilliant flash will please our neighbor, without burdening him with too much thought.

In Pope, then, perhaps we may see a systematization of that society-verse which in loose and lyric fashion began with Lovelace, Sedley, Carew, and Rochester and has ever since been a valued type in our poetry. It is artificial, of course, and intentionally insincere, that is, untrue to the entire mind of the writer, but we should be poor indeed without it. Pope has written much in a more serious vein. Perhaps his masterpiece in this sort of Dresden china is his airy "Rape of the Lock."

To what parts of life will such a method in its graver use be applicable? Certainly not to the human interior, the soul of man. For this it is totally inadequate. There we are much swayed by irrational passions. Chiefly to the outside of life a poetry is confined which sets much store on a standard language and insists on what is rational in our dealings with one another. Poets who have been most influenced by conceptions of this kind incline to call themselves "moral" poets, making the word refer chiefly to our *mores* or manners, the way in

which personal character displays itself in outward behavior. Thus Pope writes,

> "Not in fancy's maze I wandered long,
> But stooped to truth and moralized my song."

In his early years through a wide variety of subjects Pope sought to entertain his readers with pleasing sentimentalities. But after the interval following his work on Homer and Shakspere, the great world of human conduct in all its picturesqueness, folly, and whimsicality opened before him, and he set himself to study it and teach it propriety.

Yet neither Pope nor the later poets of manners offer us the sharply differentiated individual life. They deal with typical character, expressive of some universal principle, not with particular persons. Accordingly they easily pass over into moralizing and are not afraid of a stock expression. How far we have travelled since Pope's day! How eagerly do our young poets, shunning his simplicity and dreading a commonplace phrase, tie up their uncertain thoughts in knots hard to unravel. Pope's contrasted aims are well expressed in one of his letters to Walsh: "It seems to me not so much the perfection of sense to say those things that have never been said before" — in that en-

deavor at surprise so valued by previous poets — "as to say those things best that have been said oftenest." Or as he versifies the same thought:

> "True wit is nature to advantage dressed;
> What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed."

We have no right then to demand profound thought from Pope. That is not what he sought, nor what his special circumstances fitted him to give. He aims at perfect expression. He takes the ordinary thoughts of average men and puts them with a neatness, vivacity, fullness, and terseness combined, which had never been seen before. Occasionally his desire for compact simplicity prevents the instantaneous seizure of his meaning. But this is rare. Usually he gives us the perfection of rhetorical verse, something between prose and poetry. That this was his proper sphere he well understood. "Verse-man or prose-man, term me which you will," he writes. It was to working within such narrow limits that all his industrious life was given; and it was because he accepted those limits that he rose to fame.

Against them, though they are the strength of his poetry, we are inclined to rebel. As we turn his page, we probably say, "This is not

what I care for most in poetry." No, indeed, it is not. But is it not a precious, entertaining, instructive ingredient of poetry? Would we not wish to write with such brilliant simplicity? Could English poetry have progressed without these lessons on style? And would not our literature have missed something if it had never been embellished with these striking pictures of the conduct of our ancestors? I should answer all these questions in the affirmative and should say that any one too indolent to enter imaginatively into the restricted world of Pope will be cutting himself off from a powerful means of intellectual enlargement.

Hitherto I have laid exclusive stress on the classical side of Pope. It is his adhesion to established standards of literature and conduct, his valuation of criticism above spontaneity, his substitution of second thoughts for first, in short his insistence on an unclouded rational diction, and his skill in bringing a single important metre to perfection, which marks his type and makes him a turning point in English poetry. But he has many collateral excellencies. One capable of such pithy utterance can in a sentence confer an immortality of honor or shame. And what a historian he is! Where

else can we bring ourselves so fully into that strife between Whig and Tory through which the Protestant line of Hanover was fixed on the English throne and the Catholic Stuarts held in exile? Pope's party was defeated, but his comments and criticisms are the more interesting on that account. And then just because his attention was confined to London, and to its wits, fashionable ladies, and littêrateurs, he makes us acquainted with those streets and people as if we too had been born among them. Every dozen lines of Pope brings before us some notable person, animated scene, or peculiar custom, long since gone. We may at first incline to compare his gallery of striking portraits with Chaucer's variety, or with the groups of delightful nobodies sketched in a subsequent age by Crabbe and Jane Austen. But on reflection we see that the methods of painting are contrasted. The Classicist Pope starts with what is general in man; these other writers with what is peculiar. His is an intellectual apprehension of fundamental principles of conduct, which his figures merely illustrate. His characterizations are accordingly brief though deep-going. The other writers I have named proceed by minute observation of facts.

Undoubtedly their people are more vivid. I cannot count them more memorable, varied, or instructive. They suit our taste better, as Shakspere suits us better than Ben Jonson.

The charge is often brought against Pope that he employed a poetic diction and is responsible for the artificial phrases used by those who came after him. I believe this to be unjust. In the tentative efforts of his early period, and also in his translation of the Iliad, the language is often bookish, ornamented, and unlike that of the man on the street. And this is natural. Poets do not like to call a spade a spade, for they see something more in every object than does the passing beholder. This heightened dignity they sometimes try to convey by the use of conventional words, such as the casual beholder would never use; or else out of the language of that common man they select words with a sensitiveness to their precise significance and emotional value such as he himself never possessed. The former method, as the easier, is apt to be followed by half-made poets. It was followed to some extent by Pope himself when learning his art, and afterwards by such imitators of his defects as Young, Blair, and Pollok. But when in his third period Pope

has attained mastery, he uses the plainest of speech. Any one reading the "Moral Essays," "The Dunciad," the "Epistles," and "Satires" of Pope may well wonder not only at the plainness, solidity, and effectiveness of the diction, but at Pope's instinct for words that were destined to survive. Little in these pieces has become antiquated. Pope instructs us well how to talk strongly to-day.

Several times in this chapter I have mentioned successive sections of Pope's life. They are three. Taking that life as extending from 1688 to 1744, its first period may be reckoned as ending with the beginning of his work on the "Iliad" in 1715, with the publication of his Collected Works in 1717, and the death of his father in that year, or with his settlement at Twickenham a year later. This is his period of experiment and miscellaneous verse. His period as a translator and editor follows; when between 1715 and 1726 Homer and Shakspere put him above financial need for the rest of his life. His third period running from 1726 to his death — his "Moral" period — shows him in the easy command of his wealth, time, and powers, aphorizing on manners, criticizing conduct, and indulging his taste for gardening and quarrels.

These roughly outlined periods, it will be seen, mark off literary stages rather than stages of personal life. Pope's life contains few events distinct from literature. All is subordinated to that great end. But those few events I may as well bring into connection with his literary development.

I have said that his father moved to Binfield when Pope was but a child. Attempts were made in these early years to procure him education. From one small school or unimportant priest he moved each year to another. Before he was twelve he found the best teacher he ever knew, himself. A boy at home, he set himself to serious study of the Latin writers, a few of the French, and several of those of England, especially Dryden. The Latin Statius he translated into verse, often with felicity. He spent much time on Virgil, ever afterwards a favorite. Many of the Greek and Latin poets he read in translation, and he himself wrote four thousand lines of an epic on Alexander the Great. Early, too, he gained the acquaintance of several cultivated Catholic families of his neighborhood, and brought himself into correspondence with some of the eminent writers of the generation which was just passing away.

From them he obtained much valuable criticism and practised himself also in giving it. By overstraining that feeble health of his, Pope was able, before he was twenty-one, to put together a volume of Pastorals which was published in 1709. It fixed the attention of the literary world on the youth and made men understand that a new leader had appeared.

But with growing fame came interference with study. For the next half-dozen years Pope was much in London literary society. He became acquainted with Addison, Swift, Gay, Arbuthnot, and with smaller men like Tickell, Phillips, and Dennis, over whose supposed iniquities his pen was to be long busy. Literature was at this time largely the handmaid of politics; partisanship and strife were regular adjuncts of the trade. Great writers, like Swift, did not hesitate to accept political pay. When a single issue so dominated the life of the nation as did that of the English Crown, literature and politics could not be kept apart. In 1714 Queen Anne died. In 1715 England was invaded by the Pretender. From that time till the death of Pope and the second Stuart rising party spirit ran high. Other influences, too, coöperated to disorganize literature. Literary prop-

erty was imperfectly guarded and unscrupulous publishers were common. While an author usually sold his manuscript outright, his largest gain often came from the great men to whom he dedicated or from recognition by the government itself.

On the whole, through such adverse circumstances Pope moved forward in his career with singular independence and success. He put forth in these years his "Pastorals," "The Messiah," "Windsor Forest," the "Essay on Criticism," the "Rape of the Lock," "Eloisa," the "Unfortunate Lady," and nearly as much more miscellaneous verse — a prodigious amount, considering its quality, his health and his distractions — received good pay for it, put himself under no patron, and refused pensions proffered by the Government. But he was not so successful in keeping clear of petty squabbles. In these years quarrels were begun which grew steadily wider and more bitter till they blossomed into superb amplitude in the gardens of "The Dunciad." Pope's nervous constitution made him irritable, quick to resent a fancied slight, disparagement, or rivalry. He was greedy of praise, yet, like most of us, ashamed to acknowledge it. We

cannot truly grant him what he claimed for himself, "That if he pleased, he pleased in manly ways." His temper was rather feminine than masculine, highly sensitive both for good and ill, not too scrupulous about petty falsehoods, and inclining rather to covert than to open agencies for accomplishing what he desired. But he had feminine affections also, tenderness and tenacity, a knack for knowing lovable people, like Gay, Garth, and Berkeley, or for dealing tactfully with crabbed ones like Swift. In later years he refused an honorary degree from Cambridge University — a proud distinction for one who had been kept from education as a boy — because no degree was offered also to his friend Warburton. His devotion to his indulgent father, and especially to his mother during her sixteen years of aged widowhood, was extreme. Servants lived long with him. When Dennis, his bitterest enemy, grew old and poor, friends offered him a benefit at Drury Lane, for which Pope wrote the prologue. Several of his quarrels were envenomed by scandalous attacks on his parents. While cases of reprehensible animosity are not difficult to find in Pope's stormy career, on the whole in most of his warfare with Grub Street

our sympathies go with him. He stood for literature pure and simple, as contrasted with that fostered by the Government, aristocratic society, or mercenary booksellers.

But I anticipate. Much of the independence I have been describing was deliberately planned and secured during the eleven years' drudgery of his second period, 1715–1726. It is amazing that a young man, little more than twenty-five years old, and known to have but a slender acquaintance with Greek, should already have gained such repute as to secure him six hundred subscribers to a six-volume translation of the "Iliad," costing a guinea a volume. Counting what the publishers also paid, he took in about £5000 from the "Iliad" alone. For the "Odyssey" he received nearly £4000 more, though in this he did only half the work, letting out the remainder to his assistants, Broome and Fenton. And what a masterpiece he produced! Though its magniloquent sentences are somewhat out of the taste of our time, what translation of the "Iliad" shows such sustained poetic charm? If any of us were sentenced to read an entire Book of the "Iliad" at a sitting, to what translation would we turn so soon as to Pope's? Knowledge of the language from which

a translation is made is immeasurably less important than a knowledge of that into which. Bentley might well complain that Pope did not understand the meaning of certain words and phrases of Homer's, but he understood — what only a poet could — how to write a page that would carry his reader into the thick of the fight.

When we consider the greater value of money in Pope's time, it is evident that the amount received from his Greek labors, and from the less important editing of Shakspere, made him a man of means. He was at least affluent enough to write henceforth what he pleased, to entertain friends agreeably, to amuse himself with gardening or grotto-building at Twickenham, and to be able to place a stone seat or obelisk wherever it gave dignity to the view. The charming villa where Pope spent the last half of his life lay on the bank of the Thames a dozen miles from London. Though he only hired it, every reader of his verse or letters has shared his enjoyment of it.

It is from this third period of Pope's life, 1726–1744, and from the gardens of Twickenham, that what is most characteristic and valuable in his poetry proceeds. That is not a common case with poets. The writing of their early

and middle years is ordinarily their best. With advancing age imagination is apt to decay and their work to lack freshness. Pope's poetic powers developed early and were recognized early, but they continued, and he did not find the true field for his genius until his fame was well established. During this third period he devoted himself almost entirely to a species of writing which before his Homeric days he had practised but slightly. It is the satiric delineation of character — that of others and his own — not realistically, but ever as illustrative of some fundamental principle. Beginning with a classification of all the tribe of fools in "The Dunciad," advancing in the "Essay on Man" to an analysis of the conditions under which humanity everywhere finds itself and then, after showing in the "Moral Essays" the peculiar temptations to which men, women, riches, and learning expose us, he advances to those delicious Horatian pieces where audacious satire shows an ease, compactness, and incisive form hardly paralleled elsewhere in English verse. "At every word a reputation dies," or a graceful compliment is fastened on a friend. Here Pope's power of expression reaches its height. The pretty banter of the Rape of the

Lock has gone on to force and pungency, with no loss of ease. Throughout the whole period we detect the influence of Bolingbroke, the philosophic statesman, who in 1626 had settled at Dawley, ten miles from Twickenham, and who now, after the departure of Swift to Ireland, became for a dozen years Pope's guiding mind. He it was who first taught Pope that "the proper study of mankind is man," and it was his suggestion which prompted the Horatian Satires. With the ending of the "Satires," in 1738, Bolingbroke left Dawley and Pope wrote no more poetry except a fourth Book of "The Dunciad" in 1739.

Of the remaining years of Pope when, under the guidance of the scheming and pompous Bishop Warburton, he busied himself with the disgraceful editing of his letters and the revision of his works, it is fortunately unnecessary to speak. Pope had matured early and early the restless mind, like that of Dryden's "Achitophel,"

> "Fretted the pigmy body to decay
> And o'erinformed its tenement of clay."

He died in his fifty-sixth year at Twickenham, unmarried, leaving most of his property to Martha Blount, who had been his friend for thirty years.

SUGGESTIONS FOR READING

"The Messiah" shows the artificial diction with which Pope's work began.

A couple of pages should be read from the "Essay on Criticism," in order to see Pope's early epigrammatic style in its extreme form.

Read also "The Rape of the Lock," especially Part III, and Book I of the "Essay on Man," with the "Universal Prayer." Among the "Moral Essays," that on "The Characters of Men," and among the "Satires" the "Epistle to Arbuthnot" and that to Augustus.

But Pope is not seen to best advantage in his continuous writing. He is dimmed by his own brilliancy. I subjoin, therefore, a group of fragments, chosen almost at random, to show how he can make common truth shine:

Fragments from Pope

'T is with our judgments as our watches, none
Go just alike, yet each believes his own.

Horace still charms with graceful negligence
And without method talks us into sense.

Behold the child by nature's kindly law
Pleased with a rattle, tickled with a straw;
Some livelier plaything gives his youth delight,
A little louder, but as empty quite;
Scarfs, garters, gold, amuse his riper stage,
And beads and prayer-books are the toys of age;
Pleased with this bauble still, as that before,
Till tired he sleeps, and life's poor play is o'er.

Heaven first taught letters for some wretch's aid,
Some banished lover and some captive maid.

'T is education forms the common mind,
Just as the twig is bent the tree's inclined.

Who shames a scribbler? Break one cobweb through,
He spins the slight self-pleasing thread anew.
Destroy his fib or sophistry — in vain!
The creature's at his dirty work again,
Throned in the centre of his thin designs,
Proud of a vast extent of flimsy lines.

You beat your pate and fancy wit will come,
Knock as you please, there's nobody at home.

'T is use alone that sanctifies expense,
And splendor borrows all her rays from sense.

All the distant din the world can keep
Rolls o'er my grotto, and but soothes my sleep.

Let humble Allen, with an awkward shame,
Do good by stealth and blush to find it fame.

Feign what I will, and paint it e'er so strong,
Some rising genius sins up to my song.

My head and heart thus flowing thro' my quill,
Verse-man or prose-man, term me which you will,
Papist or Protestant, or both between,
Like good Erasmus, in an honest mean,
In moderation placing all my glory,
While Tories call me Whig, and Whigs a Tory.

Index-learning turns no student pale,
Yet holds the eel of science by the tail.

The Muse shall sing, and what she sings shall last.

Codrus writes on, and will forever write.

Even copious Dryden wanted or forgot
The last and greatest art, the art to blot.

The gods, to curse Pamela with her prayers,
Gave the gay coach and dappled Flanders mares,
The shining robes, rich jewels, beds of state,
And, to complete her bliss, a fool for mate;
She glares in balls, front boxes, and the ring,
A vain, unquiet, glittering, wretched thing.

Eternal smiles his emptiness betray,
As shallow streams run dimpling all the way.

If to her share some female errors fall,
Look in her face, and you'll forgive them all.

Ask you why Wharton broke through every rule?
'T was all for fear the knaves would call him fool.

For forms of government let fools contest,
Whate'er is best administered is best.

From vulgar bounds with brave disorder part,
And snatch a grace beyond the reach of art.

Me let the tender office long engage
To rock the cradle of reposing age,

With lenient arts extend a mother's breath,
Make languor smile and smooth the bed of death,
Explore the thought, explain the asking eye,
And keep awhile one parent from the sky.

Nature and nature's laws lay hid in night.
God said, "Let Newton be!" and all was light.

VI

William Wordsworth

VI

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

In this chapter we enter a new world. We have left the age of reason, the orderly, well-planned world of the Classicists, and turn to one which has no fear of disorder, the world of the Romanticists. We have seen how the men who followed Spenser became dissatisfied with his witcheries. His verse was too sweet; they wanted a taste of the bitter. Rousing themselves from Spenser's hypnotic spell, they eagerly turned to mental exertion. Just so a reaction set in against Pope and wrought an entire overturn of the classical theory. The revolution, however, was longer delayed in the case of Pope and was more fundamental. During his life Pope's sway was little contested. Indeed if we include his entire life, we may say that Pope ruled English literature for nearly a century. When at last the revolt came, under Wordsworth, that innovator was obliged to spend half his years and nearly all his powers before the worth of what he was doing was recognized. It would be no exaggeration to

say that it took two political revolutions to bring about the new Romanticism: the American Revolution in which the dignity of the individual was asserted, and the earth-shaking French Revolution where under the teaching of Rousseau the common instincts of our nature were championed as precious and safe. Wordsworth's work it was to present imaginatively the results of these two revolutions.

To understand the large scope of that work it will be well to bring before our minds some general traits of romantic poetry as contrasted with classical. Not that these traits appear alike in all; there are many varieties. We must not be misled by lazy labels — romantic, classical. Characteristics of the one occur blended in varying degrees with those of the other. Yet it remains true that the Classicists as a school averted their gaze from half of human ken, and that men grew discontented with their narrow outlook, believing that in reality the half which they refused to see was the more important. I will then sum up in a few successive sections the chief characteristics of the romantic poetry as it diverges from the classical.

(1) The obvious one, which immediately strikes the attention even of a careless reader,

is the different fields from which their subjects are drawn. The Classicist deals with mankind, especially with the intellectual men and women of society. He enjoys the strife of tongues and likes to observe the oddities and inconsistencies of his species. He is a social being and therefore finds his dwelling-place in the city. Exactly the opposite is the case with the Romanticist. His field is the country. He cares less for man, at least for man apart from nature. Only in the union of man and nature does he count either comprehensible. Accordingly nature pervades the whole of his poetry. No matter if he professes to deal with men and women in their most personal relations, he projects them against a background of the country. It will be objected that this is no invention of the Romanticists. Nature was known long before the eighteenth century; and even during that century, while the rationality of man was exalted, there were nature poets too.

There certainly were through all the eighteenth century. But when examined closely they will be seen to resemble the Romanticists only slightly. These men, no doubt, prepared the coming change but did not in themselves show what it was to be. Certain poets wrote

of nature prompted not so much by the scenery around them as by their recollections of Virgil. Virgil had loved the country and in his masterly "Georgics" described the scenes and labors of country life. His great name sanctified country poetry, particularly in England where Latin authors moulded the minds of the young in school and university. Shenstone and Thomson show much of this tendency, though both had also a genuine love of nature. Then too the English have always lived largely out of doors and outside cities, and their literature might therefore be expected to make frequent mention of the plain facts of the country — soil, crops, cattle, sports, storms, sunshine — even when the writers have little poetic vision. Dyer, Somerville, Falconer, are such reporters of natural fact, and to a considerable extent Cowper too. But there is poetry nearer to the romantic than this. No movement bursts forth on a sudden. There is always a preparation, and in the conditions which precede we can usually detect its germs. So underneath the established poetry of man a poetry is gradually forming which looks rather in a Gothic than in a classical direction and feels man to be so mysteriously allied with nature that in

nature the moods of man find themselves somehow reflected. We are all familiar with such anticipative poetry in the writings of Gray, Collins, Burns, Blake. All these men know no sharp partition between the worlds of nature and of spirit. Man lives in the midst of that which is not alien to him.

(2) It is this view of nature, scantily represented in the eighteenth century while Pope ruled, which the Romanticists took up and carried to a completeness unknown before. For not only do the Romanticists feel themselves gladdened through contact with nature, but a certain personal presence seems ever to meet them there. The country is therefore holy ground. There God abides. Men have driven him from the cities. In woods and hills we hear a voice which answers to our own. The Classicist conceives of God as the Great Artificer, "the great first cause, least understood," who ages ago set the world running, gave it fixed laws and then withdrew from interference, letting it thereafter care for itself. And certainly if a skilful workman could construct a perpetual-motion machine, he might thenceforth wisely retire from business. The Romanticist knows nothing of such a retired God. To his

mind God is immanent in nature, not sundered from it. To-day he is as genuinely working there as ever he was. So closely involved is he that we can speak of him as if he were nature itself, of nature as if it were he.

(3) This reverential way of approaching nature is pretty fundamental in romantic poetry and gives to it another special mark, mystery, the sense of wonder. Wonder was hardly known to the Classicists, for their world is a place of well-defined bounds. They touch only those sides of life which can be rationally verified, and consequently inhabit a world as clear as day. But what they look on with annoyance and distrust is the delight and place of abode of the Romanticist. As he goes forth into nature he finds everywhere more than he can comprehend. A half-understood friend seems to be calling and to find an answer in the depths of his own being. He does not refuse to listen to the appealing voice because it is indistinct, but joyously acknowledges that mystery encompasses all that is clear.

(4) Naturally enough where such a sense of wonder is at work enthusiastic utterance will follow. The Romanticist honors enthusiasm, which Pope and his companions scorn. To

their eye it shows bad breeding and would be unpleasant at an evening party. The Romanticist, however, dimly perceiving a reality greater than his fragmentary understanding can grasp, is stirred to enthusiasm by the wonder it excites. At the very time when the literary and intellectual classes of England never mentioned enthusiasm without contempt, other classes were shaping by its use some of the greatest forces of the age. It was in 1739 that John Wesley opened his chapel in London, from which went forth a band of religious enthusiasts who brought a new dignity into daily life and lowered that of those hitherto accounted leaders. Through them religion acquired a reality of significance for the personal life which the fashionable deism of the Established Church had lacked. The age was starved for mystery and enthusiasm. It knew it was starved and it rewarded, perhaps unduly, whoever could supply its need. Ossian's strange poetry (1762) resounded throughout Europe. And about the time of the coming of Wordsworth there appeared a fantastic literature of wonder in the novels of Horace Walpole, Ann Radcliffe, and Monk Lewis. When, too, we disparage that sober sense to which the Classicist had held

and react in favor of feeling and a sense of mystery, we are in danger of such sentimentalism as uttered itself in Sterne's "Sentimental Journey" and Mackenzie's "Man of Feeling."

(5) In whatever direction we turn, we see a momentous revolution preparing. Its outward manifestations I have just traced. Its central principle appears in the new place it gives to the feelings in contrast to the intellect. Clear consciousness, it urged, does not cover the whole of life, not even the major part of it. The half-conscious instincts of mankind have always been his surest directors. We see this on a broad scale in the great popular movements which have revolutionized the world. These have not been the working out of precise plans of action; they have been for the most part blind motions, little understood by those who led them. Yet how vastly significant! Just so in private life the common man who follows his fundamental instincts is a more significant subject for poetry than the merely intellectual man. Classicism, because it insisted on the supremacy of reason was interested only in superior persons. It was aristocratic. Romanticism is the embodiment of democracy. We

shall hardly discover an intellectual figure in the poetry of Wordsworth. Perhaps we may instance "The Happy Warrior," or Protesilaus, the husband of Laodameia. But Wordsworth usually deals with plain men and women, such as Michael, Margaret, Matthew, or the Leech Gatherer, people who are swayed less by reason than by instincts and half-conscious impulses. It is the elemental side of human nature, almost ignored by the aristocratic Classicists, which now attracts reverence. In 1765 Bishop Percy published his "Reliques of English Poetry," collecting in its three volumes the folk-songs, ballads, and half-instinctive rhymes through which popular feeling had been expressing itself for several centuries. In general the writers were unknown. Ballads, it is said, have no single author. They voice the spirit of a community. And even if this spirit acquires occasionally a single mouthpiece, he is of consequence only in so far as he embodies the thoughts and aspirations of a multitude. Literary men had hitherto looked down on such verse, as lacking in art, but Bishop Percy's volumes came at a fortunate moment and were warmly acclaimed. Men saw here another source of poetry than the Classicists had used.

The book was the herald of the romantic movement.

(6) Such a changed attitude of mind requires enlarged and liberated modes of expression. The poetic medium which the Classicists had carefully constructed was inadequate for the new needs. Pope had shaped for himself a perfect instrument in his couplet of ten-syllabled iambic lines, rhyming together and rarely running over into the next couplet. His diction, too, had had the light touch, was swift and easy, in short was the language of cultivated life. His followers could not be expected to equal Pope's delicacy. His heroic couplet became mechanically rigid. His occasionally heightened language was turned into poetic diction. The narrow bounds within which eighteenth-century emotion was content to express itself seem strange to us. Perhaps in aiming at perfection one must accept narrow bounds. But the Romanticist aims at nothing so small as perfection. He seeks the infinite, which never can be perfected. Accordingly a poetic instrument less constrained in compass is needed by him. The couplet, when used, is allowed to run over; blank verse is coaxed into many a new cadence; the sonnet, which honors

a special mood, is revived; and free lyrical forms spring up in almost as great variety as among the followers of Donne.

On the whole, we may say of the Romanticists what Wordsworth said of himself, that they "live by admiration, hope, and love." The Classicists, on the contrary, live by reason, epigram, and strife. Yet we may easily do them injustice. We must by no means imagine their work to have been futile. They represent our social side and guard the standards our race has set up. It is through their prized qualities of reason, clearness, and precision that man is able to live with man. Their great office it is to deal with the organic functions of society; they merely leave out of account the individual human being, who certainly had become somewhat self-absorbed among their immediate predecessors. He it is who is now restored to his rights under Wordsworth. Not that so great a change could be effected by any single man. I have shown how throughout the eighteenth century, especially during its latter half, converging forces were moving toward what was afterwards known as Romanticism. But Wordsworth was the first to know fully their meaning. He completely embodied them, illus-

trating them in his poems and expounding them in his Prefaces. He was a serious scholar, too, in English poetry, acquainted with its whole extent and devoting a long life to its practice. Above all, men felt behind his novel lines a weighty personality, which ultimately compelled their admiration, and a distaste for the thin and artificial verse which preceded his. He may well be taken then as the prophet of the new movement. The circumstances of his life were favorable to a fresh poetic vision.

That life extended from 1770 to 1850 and falls into four periods: (1) the period of his training, up to 1798; (2) his mastery, 1798–1815; (3) his decline, 1815–1842; (4) the failure of his powers, 1842–1850. Obviously these periods were not so sharply separated in his life as on my pages. But they are natural dates, true turning-points in his career. The first ends with the publication of the "Lyrical Ballads," the second with his two volumes of "Collected Poems," the third with his appointment as Poet Laureate. Only the first two have importance here.

Wordsworth was born in Cockermouth, a small town on the west side of the English Lake District, a section of country only twenty-five

miles square, yet possessing a diversified beauty not easily matched elsewhere. While its hills never rise above three thousand feet, they are strikingly precipitous and majestic on account of their slate formation. In the green valleys at their feet lie lakes both small and large, sometimes long so as almost to give the impression of a stream; while those that Wordsworth says he loves best are so completely round as to forbid the thought of the passage of water. This round effect is sometimes emphasized by an island. While the lowlands are luxuriant with trees and flowers, the hillsides are bare and the mountain moors, with their occasional rocky tarns, have a solemn savagery. For some time each day mists float about the peaks, down whose sides rush the many ghylls, or small streams, whose happy voices echo throughout Wordsworth's pages. One who lives in these valleys is seldom without the sound of falling water.

In this beautiful land Wordsworth was born and here lived for nine tenths of his life. He was born in the common ranks, neither in poverty nor in riches, but in that happy middle condition where the worth of man is most apparent. His father was the business agent

of the Earl of Lonsdale. Wordsworth's mother died when he was eight years old, his father five years later. At the death of his mother he was sent to the village of Hawkshead on Esthwait Lake, a spot even more impressive than Cockermouth, the mountains being higher and the lake of peculiar splendor. Here two centuries earlier had been founded what the English call a Grammar School and we an Academy, or place of preparation for the University. Though not large, seldom having so many as a hundred pupils, it had excellent teachers and was one of the best schools of Northern England. All was plain in school and village. Wordsworth, a boy of eight, lived in the cottage of a motherly woman of the working class. All his life thereafter was shared with the common people of this district. But these common people were not insignificant. In the Lake Country the land is generally owned by him who works it, an exceptional thing in England. Most English land is owned by gentlemen, from whom the farmer hires. In the Lake Country, through some curious tradition, it has come about that the land is largely owned by the cultivators themselves, who proudly call themselves "Statesmen," that is, owners of estates. While,

then, they are peasantry, living in humble thatched cottages rarely two stories high, they are also men of property and self-respect. With this independent class, who had formed no habits of cringing subservience, Wordsworth grew up. Nine years he spent at Hawkshead, and in the first Book of that wonderful poem, "The Prelude," he shows us the growth of his mind there. He describes how nature laid hold of and gradually shaped him, until he came to reverence the scenes around him as if they were personal beings.

There was little ready money in the Wordsworth family at this time. The father's property was tied up in a lawsuit. The Earl of Lonsdale owed the estate a considerable sum for loans and arrears of wages, but the payment was evaded through excuse and postponement until Wordsworth was thirty years old. His uncles, however, advanced the means for his education and he resided at St. John's College, Cambridge, from 1787 to 1791. He always disparages the English University training and says he obtained little from it. But such statements require qualification. He certainly acquired a good acquaintance with Latin and English literature, learned to use books, and to

mingle freely with men. These are not inconsiderable gains. No doubt, coming as he did a solitary boy from the country, accustomed to brood over the meaning of nature and having deeper sympathies with it than with mankind, he remained a good deal detached. The spirit of the place was alien to him, but not the less beneficial. The vacations, too, of an English University, being as long as the term time, gave him opportunity to return to his loved mountains and there renew the experiences of his early years. In 1790, the year before he left the University, he spent the summer vacation on a pedestrian tour through France to Switzerland, having as his companion a fellow collegian, Robert Jones. The two young men had little money, but eager hearts and sturdy legs. They were good observers. Wordsworth had early fixed his mind on poetry. When he returned he brought with him the material for a long poem entitled "Descriptive Sketches."

This poem, however, cannot be called his first. Another had been begun earlier, of similar character and about equal length. During two of his University vacations he attempted to picture in verse the scenes which moved him,

and the completed poem he printed in the same year as the "Descriptive Sketches" under the title of "An Evening Walk." The two in their early form are of extreme interest for the student of English poetry, for they stand at a parting of the ways. Youthful they are in many respects, lacking in structure, and often feeble in execution; they show their writer in transition from the ideals of Classicism to those of Romanticism. Their verse is the closed couplet; their language, the artificial poetic diction of the followers of Pope. But their substance is purely realistic. Nature, not man, is their theme. The poet's eye is continually on its object. Everything is specific, the generalizing epigram seldom used. Indeed so far do they go in accurate observation that poetry is often overlooked. The marks, abundant here of the type of poetry which Wordsworth was to spend his life in combating, are the more striking because so speedily outgrown. Five years later, when the "Lyrical Ballads" were published, no trace of the earlier manner remained. Unfortunately most readers are unable to observe the change. Later editions of both poems are thoroughly revised. Two poems of quite ordinary merit have taken the

place of two whose historic importance was exceptional.

"An Evening Walk" was dedicated to his sister, Dorothy. Of all the circumstances in Wordsworth's life fitting him for his difficult task, the influence of that remarkable woman must be counted the most fortunate. A year and a half younger than her brother, she shared his thoughts and hopes from childhood. Outward intercourse was interrupted for a time by his life in Hawkshead, Cambridge, and France. Yet even then letters kept them united. When he settled in England his sister joined him and was not again parted from him for more than fifty years. Many who knew them both thought her the more original poetic genius. She had more ardor than her brother, was more swiftly observant, and no less sure in her choice of words. But she was content to merge her talents in his. She criticized all he wrote, often suggested subjects, discussed plans of development, and frequently furnished admirable lines for his poems. I have her copy of "An Evening Walk." Many passages are rewritten in her hand, and in later editions Wordsworth adopted most of the changes there proposed. He was never tired of acknowledging his obligations to her.

"She gave me eyes, she gave me ears,
And humble cares and delicate fears,
A heart the fountain of sweet tears,
And love and thought and joy."

For one naturally so solitary as he, and rendered still more so by his aggressive task, her stimulating sympathy was of inestimable worth.

Immediately on leaving the University, Wordsworth went abroad again. A vagrant element was ever deep in him. He was wayward and did not like to live by plan. "This one day" he was ever ready to "give to idleness." For books he never greatly cared, but thought his mind fed best "in a wise passiveness." Frequent journeyings were really his books, journeyings mostly on foot. So for half a dozen years after graduation, poor though he was, he chose no definite career. His uncles pressed him to enter the Church. He neither did so nor refused, but with other dreams in mind turned back to France. And here once more his usual good fortune attended him, permitting him personal experience of that tremendous awakening of a people. He tells us in "The Prelude" how now for the first time he felt the worth of man. Unlike most

of us, he had known nature and lived in communion with her long before he discovered man.

The year which Wordsworth now spent in France was a momentous one in the life of the French nation. Instructed by a young French lieutenant, Beaupuis, Wordsworth heartily accepted the principles of the Revolution and seriously considered joining the Club of the Gironde. The influence of Rousseau was keenly felt and has left its permanent mark on his poetry. As he seemed to see a new race of mankind arising around him, generous, free from institutional control, bent on giving equal opportunities to all, with warm mystic aspirations substituted for doctrinal beliefs, his heart burned to work a similar democratic revolution in poetry. For one brought up among the independent population of Cumberland there was nothing absurd in French ideals of equality. But easy too it became under these laxer ideals to let self-expression triumph over moral restraint. Professor Harper has shown on indubitable evidence that during this year of emancipation a French girl bore him a daughter. Those who think of Wordsworth as cold and formal are misled, I think, by his lack of humor

and his ability to live alone. At any rate the democratic fervor which burst into full consciousness during this year in France, represents most of what distinguishes Wordsworth. As that democratic sentiment decayed in later years, most of his powers went with it. During his second period it was helpfully attended, but not suppressed, by other interests.

Funds failing, Wordsworth was obliged to return to England. He came home enthusiastic for popular sovereignty and found his country preparing to declare war on it. The shock was severe. He tells us that for some time he could not hear of a victory of the French over his own people without a throb of exultation. Worst of all, the Revolution itself began to disappoint him. Wild excesses broke out. Chaotic liberty set free the brute in man. Yet the repressive measures of his own government disturbed him hardly less. In this season of perplexity he came under the influence of William Godwin, the doctrinaire socialist, who would reconstruct society according to a rational plan. Popular instincts, which Wordsworth had hitherto honored, were to be cast away and replaced by calculations of pleasure and pain. Teachings so at issue with Words-

worth's natural beliefs induced in him a sort of pessimism which lasted, it is true, but a few years. It is traceable in such poems as "Guilt and Sorrow," the strange tragedy of "The Borderers," and in the denunciations so frequent afterwards of the analyzing intellect. To win peace and hope once more he set himself to a serious study of society and the sources from which happiness springs. Happiness had been somehow missed in France. Wordsworth came to believe that it cannot be attained through legislation or by changes in social forms. These lie outside man, while the grounds of happiness are within. Inventions do not necessarily bring happiness, though adding to the comfort and ease of ordinary life. Intellect does not insure it, nor wealth, nor any of the things the vulgar follow. It springs from a different soil, the soil of a prepared heart. When we train those fundamental instincts which ally us with God, with nature, with our fellowmen, to be simple, strong, responsive, we shall be happy and the State prosperous.

In the years 1795–1798 Wordsworth fashioned his gospel and dedicated himself to proclaim it. By purification of the emotions he

will bring men such joy and freedom as they have never known before. The poet's office is now seen to be divine. Into it Wordsworth pours all the enthusiasm of the revolutionary time but adds to it judgment, poise, and consecration. Hardly in any other poet has so penetrating an expression been given to the familiar aspects of nature, the homeliness of domestic life, and the sense of an encompassing power always attending us with its love. A response to that love, expressed in joyous acceptance of nature and human life, is open to all.

To the proclamation of these doctrines in poetry, their only fit medium, Wordsworth at once addressed himself. His sister gave him hearty sympathy and a friend provided the means. For a year or two after returning from France, Wordsworth had seen much of a young Cumberland man, Raisley Calvert, who, dying in 1795, left Wordsworth nine hundred pounds. To Calvert lovers of Wordsworth owe a monument, for he it was who made this soul-renewing poetry possible. The little income from the Wordsworth estate which had hitherto enabled him to live without occupation was now exhausted. Had it not been for Calvert's

opportune bounty the poet, just when he had discovered his sacred calling, must have been forced into some bread-winning profession. Calvert saved him for us. The sum was small; but it made a poetic career possible for one who could live as peasants live. In 1795 he hired a house in Dorsetshire on the south coast of England, and there his sister joined him. By close economy, Calvert's gift met all their needs till the settlement of the Lonsdale claim, six years later.

At their home in Dorsetshire the pair were visited in 1796 by Coleridge, and a lifelong and mutually advantageous friendship was begun. No one else except his sister ever brought Wordsworth such intellectual stimulus as this learned, original, ill-ordered, and lovable fellow poet; and to Coleridge Wordsworth's sanity was a constant protection. In order to be near the new friend the Wordsworths moved the following year to Alfoxden on Bristol Channel, where Coleridge was then living. Here the three planned the momentous volume destined to bring a new poetic hope to mankind. In remembrance of Bishop Percy's revelation of the precious poetry growing up unnoticed among the common people, it was

to be called a book of Ballads; while in contrast with the formal didactic verse of the eighteenth century it was to be Lyrical. Its aim was to exhibit our humdrum world as filled with sources of wonder, the supernatural penetrating it more richly and usually than unheeding men suppose. This aim was to be effected in two ways. Coleridge, by the witchery and simplicity of his language, was to give an air of probability to the marvellous; Wordsworth was to show the presence of the mysterious in occurrences of daily life. Both alike would break through the benumbing influence of custom, would restore the lost sense of wonder, and so give back to grown men and women the freshness of interest which the child feels in everything he sees. With large assistance from Dorothy Wordsworth the friends set to work, and by 1798 the volume was ready for publication. It may well be called the Magna Charta of modern poetry. In it the modern mind at last finds itself. Here every one may read the Wordsworthian gospel of "joy in widest commonalty spread."

The tentative period of Wordsworth's life was now over. Henceforth he knew clearly what he wished to do, and for the next fifteen

years felt himself possessed of power to do it. As soon as the epoch-making volume was out, Wordsworth sought retirement. Writing always exhausted him, and he now needed time for mental brooding after so much production. He spent the winter at the small town of Goslar in Germany, producing there little beside the Lucy series of poems. Returning, he sought to establish himself with his sister in some economical spot where the country around should be beautiful and the people persons of worth. For his purposes nothing could be better than Dove Cottage at Grasmere, in the centre of the Lake Country. Here he lived for the nine years, 1799–1808, and here much of his best poetry was written. The cottage still stands, hardly superior to its neighbors, with its small rooms, stone floors, thatched roof, and small hillside garden in the rear; though now modern houses on the opposite side of the road cut off its former view of Grasmere Water. It has been bought by friends of Wordsworth and turned into an admirable memorial of him, his household furnishings replaced, and collections of his books, pictures, and letters suitably displayed.

In 1801 the lawsuit with the Earl of Lonsdale

was settled and Wordsworth received £8500. When one remembers that money at that time was worth several times what it is to-day, it is evident that Wordsworth had now a competence for life. Hitherto only by the strictest economy could he maintain himself and his sister. Now, just as his means were about exhausted, this large sum became his. The following year he married Mary Hutchinson, a friend of his sister's and a former schoolmate of his own at Hawkshead. A happy marriage it proved. She was an intellectual companion of her husband, quiet, patient and believing. Companionship with two admiring women, each endowed with more earnestness than humor, profoundly affected Wordsworth's life for good and for ill. The family's means were increased in 1813 by Wordsworth's appointment as distributor of stamps for Westmorland, and in this year he moved from Grasmere to the neighboring village and to the stately residence of Rydal Mount, where he remained till his death. Here in 1814 he published "The Excursion," and in 1815 issued the collected edition of his poems, with its elaborate Preface in defense of his poetic theories.

With these publications Wordsworth's sec-

ond period, his period of Mastery, comes to an end. Of most poets it may be said that half of their work is more than the whole. But of none is this more true than of Wordsworth and Browning. Both are burdened with a mass of indifferent verse which seriously obscures the excellence of the remainder. While Wordsworth occasionally produced good poetry after 1815, especially in sonnet form, one who would estimate his importance may wisely pass it by and accept only the earlier. Were half of all Wordsworth wrote destroyed, he would be generally acknowledged to be one of the three or four most original poets of our language.

Several causes combined to lessen his poetic power at a time when life was only half spent. The first splendor of a poet's work is apt to grow dim with time, and Wordsworth matured early. Even in 1798 when writing "Tintern Abbey" he noticed that his youthful intoxication with the sensuous beauty of nature was giving way to reflection:

> "I cannot paint
> What then I was. The sounding cataract
> Haunted me like a passion; the tall rock,
> The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
> Their colors and their forms, were then to me
> An appetite; a feeling and a love

That had no need of a remoter charm
By thought supplied, nor any interest
Unborrowed from the eye. That time is past."

He continued to speak of this half-regretted change during the next dozen years. His interest was turning more and more from the emotion excited by concrete objects to abstract thought about them. Nor was this altogether loss. The vividness of his poetry suffered, but there came a breadth of view, a sobriety of judgment, an ability to meet men and writers of unlike kinds, and a certain statesmanship in dealing with public questions beyond the range of his restricted youth. In many respects Wordsworth was developing as a man while declining as a poet.

But on the contrary, many admirers of Wordsworth think that a certain moral decline in the man attended that in the poet and was largely responsible for it. We have seen how ardent was the democratic fervor of his early years. The September Massacres occurred while he was in France. He excused them and kept his enthusiasm for the Revolution. As late as 1798 he was an object of suspicion to the English Government on account of his French sympathies and radical associates. In

that year he, Coleridge, and Southey seriously planned leaving England for America and establishing a socialist colony there. The companions of his youth were mostly children of humble parentage and for many years his home was Dove Cottage. The ordinary language of common people he thought had more poetry in it than that of the learned and refined. In short his sympathies and poetry were given to the multitude. When the liberal statesman Fox died in 1806 Wordsworth wrote an anguished lament:

> "Sad was I, even to pain deprest, —
> Importunate and heavy load."

Yet during the latter half of his life he was a Tory of the most extreme sort. He held government offices, accepted a pension, issued election manifestoes in behalf of Tory candidates, and opposed all attempts at popular education. No wonder that with such a changed mind came a transformation of his poetry. While its technical excellence remained as high as ever, its life was gone. "Ecclesiastical Sonnets" took the place of "Peter Bell" and "Lucy Gray."

Such is the indictment which Browning has poetized in his "Lost Leader." Most lovers of

Wordsworth will regretfully confess that it has some justification. Yet even so, it is well to examine the honorable influences in Wordsworth's character and in the condition of the time which might draw him in the aristocratic direction. Suggestions of corrupt influence are not even plausible. No favor, office, or pension could make a man so austere swerve from what he approved. His danger lay in an opposite direction. Throughout life he was too insistent on his own ways and too obstinate in holding to beliefs once fixed. Coleridge's opinions underwent as great a change as those of his friend, though he received no such governmental favor. Wordsworth's change from a group of democratic ideas to an aristocratic requires an explanation more subtle than Browning has offered.

As regards the shifting of his sympathies in the great war, from the French side to the English, it may be said that the Revolution abandoned him rather than he the Revolution. During his stay in France he belonged to the party of the Girondists. This was overthrown by the Jacobins and most of its members were guillotined. The Jacobins in turn became disorganized; and after a period approaching anar-

chy power was seized by Napoleon. While the early Revolution followed the dream of a world to be set free, the later sought to impose the will of one man on all Europe. The incompetence of French radicalism to organize itself, without falling into the hands of a dictator, naturally bred distrust over radicalism in general. Wordsworth expressed his detestation of Napoleon in powerful fashion, and most men to-day will agree with him in thinking England the champion of true freedom during the Napoleonic wars. But those wars were fought by the Tory party, the party of order, which gained in approval among sensible men as chaotic liberalism became discredited. It is true that Wordsworth, always a passionate lover of order, endured with too little indignation, like most of his countrymen, the harsh, repressive measures of the Government. England was in a not unreasonable panic. Many good men suffered in it. It damaged Wordsworth permanently.

To such damage Wordsworth was constitutionally predisposed, not merely by his love of order, but by his distrust of knowledge and human reason. He who holds our half conscious instincts to be our most precious possession

will not be zealous for popular education, especially in a country where it has never been tried. Wordsworth, it must be remembered, came to acquaintance with the world of nature long before he knew that of man. To institutions, therefore, those huge agencies of social life most nearly resembling powers of nature, he always attached more importance as guides than he granted to individual initiative. It is not strange then that in studying the welfare of the poor and humble, in whom he never lost interest, he doubted whether their happiness would be promoted by starting the questioning spirit. He had always set great value on the blind affections connected with the home, the land, the sheep, the hills; and with advancing years he came to distrust whatever brought personal ambition among the working classes into conflict with these. The Church itself, Professor Harper thinks, he valued more as an institution and a social force than as a stimulus to personal piety. Whether we approve these tendencies in Wordsworth or condemn them, it is only fair to notice that they imply no sudden change of sentiment, but are to a large degree developments of much that was present in his early beliefs.

Unfortunate developments I call them, especially as occurring at a time when with advancing years his mind was stiffening, concrete imagination and delight in natural beauty growing less, inclination to abstract thought increasing, and an established position in society, property, and poetic fame removing something of the stimulus to creative work. It is sad to notice how in Wordsworth's case his reputation as a poet advanced about in proportion as his powers declined. Through most of his second period, the period of Byron's dominance, he was laughed at or comprehended merely by local coteries. But in his third and declining period his reputation had so far advanced that Oxford crowned him with her highest degree. When four years later the Laureateship became vacant, it was pressed upon him. He at first refused it, on the ground of failing powers; but being urged as the acknowledged head of English poetry and as the natural successor to his friend Southey, he accepted. Curiously enough in the previous year a young poet, Alfred Tennyson, published two volumes which absorbed the attention of England and made other poetry seem for a time insipid.

A few closing words are needed to meet a current misconception of Wordsworth. Because the poor and ignorant appear so frequently in his pages, he is often supposed to be the poet of a single class. And this impression is strengthened by his insistence that the proper diction for poetry is a selection from the language of common life. As well, however, might Christ be understood as addressing his Gospel to the poor man alone. The aim in both cases is the same. The restrictions of circumstance are counted unimportant and man is addressed merely as man. But it is held that manhood is more apt to appear in its simplicity among the poor and lowly than among those entangled in the conventionalities of artificial society. Yet it is manhood, after all, not poverty that is valued.

A striking evidence that Wordsworth was unwilling to confine himself to any class is seen in his avoidance of dialect. Dialect poetry he admired when used by Burns, whose book was published twelve years before the "Lyrical Ballads." With the beautiful dialect of the Lake Country he was familiar from childhood. But dialect is the mark of a special community and a special class; and while according well

with the character of the Scotch ploughman, would have obscured the broader aims of Wordsworth. Unlike the Romanticists, he is interested in those traits which draw men together rather than in those which bring personal distinction. His figures, therefore, like those of the Classicists, are typical, and characters of marked individuality do not appear. Too little attention, in my judgment, has been paid to the avoidance of dialect by one whose interest in the plain man is so manifest.

With the development of romantic poetry under Tennyson and Browning the number of Wordsworth's readers grew steadily less, and he has never regained the favor of the multitude. But that is largely because his work, like that of Pope, was so fully accomplished that its results have been taken up into the unconscious mind of our race. In every community, too, single silent devotees may still be found who make of him their spiritual guide. Like his loved master, Milton, he is a poet for our maturity, to whom we turn when the heedless and disappointing exuberance of youth is passed. Then his calm tones of wise optimism renew for us the sources of joy. We catch in them echoes of Rousseau and of Marcus

Aurelius. Or rather, going back farther still, in his summons to the simple life and to reverence for the lowly we hear much of the message of Jesus.

SUGGESTIONS FOR READING

Matthew Arnold's "Selections from the Poems of Wordsworth" in the "Golden Treasury" series are so excellent that no better advice can be given to one who seeks acquaintance with this poet than to bid him open the little volume anywhere and begin to read. But there is no harm in mentioning a few of the poems which have given Wordsworth a permanent hold on English and American minds. (The "Lyrical Ballads" were reprinted in America in 1802.)

Among the narrative poems: "Ruth," "Michael," and "The Leach Gatherer."

Among the Lyrics: "The Solitary Reaper," "Early Spring," "The Lucy Series," "Expostulation and Reply," "The Cuckoo," "Nightingale," "Daffodils," and "Small Celandine."

Among the Sonnets: Those on "London," "Westminster Bridge," "The Beach near Calais," "The Extinction of the Venetian Republic," "Toussaint l'Ouverture," "The Subjugation of Switzerland," "To R. B. Haydon," "To Raisley Calvert," "Where lies the Land," "Scorn not the Sonnet."

Among the reflective poems: "Tintern Abbey," "Peele Castle," "The Fountain," "The Happy Warrior," "Laodameia," the "Ode to Duty," and that on the "Intimations of Immortality."

To these add the first Book of "The Prelude," especially the last half, and fragments from the Preface to the second volume of the "Lyrical Ballads." If a strong Wordsworth appetite is developed, venture — though late — on "Peter Bell."

VII

Alfred Tennyson

VII

ALFRED TENNYSON

Two gigantic figures dominate the English poetry of the nineteenth century, Alfred Tennyson and Robert Browning. Their lives stretch nearly across the century, entering it at the close of its first decade and leaving it near the beginning of its last. Their poetic span, that is the time during which they wrote, is longer, I believe, than that of any other English poet. Strange, that the two of longest flight should happen to come together! But such is the fortunate fact. Tennyson's first volume was published in 1827 when he was eighteen years old; his last, in 1892, the last year of his life, gave him a poetic span of sixty-five years. Browning fell but a year or two behind. That is an extraordinary length of poetic activity. The homely, slighted shepherd's trade is ordinarily brief. In few poets does it extend beyond twenty-five years. In some of the greatest it has not passed half a dozen. Milton might seem almost to equal Tennyson. But though his was a fairly long life his poetic work was

broken in the middle. For thirty years he turned aside to political pamphleteering and produced in poetry only a few sonnets. Wordsworth had a life of eighty years; but he began to write late and ended early. Tennyson and Browning, both poets of the highest rank, kept their creative power through a period of unexampled duration. Together they sum up the intellectual tendencies of their century as no other century has been poetically summarized.

Each, too, followed poetry as a profession and attended to nothing else. Pope was the first of our poets to be so whole-hearted. Up to his time poetry was commonly regarded as an accomplishment for the man of culture, a graceful addition to the serious tasks of life. Pope speaks with scorn of "the mob of gentlemen who write with ease." To him, to Wordsworth, Tennyson, and Browning, poetry was a grave matter. They dedicated themselves to it from childhood and took on no other employment. But by no one of them was this exclusive devotion carried so far as by Tennyson. During most of his life he withdrew from general society, wrote no prose whatever, hardly letters, giving himself altogether to his art. We demand this devotion of the painter

or musician and generally recognize that in their fields excellence is attainable only by such strenuous discipline. Curiously enough in poetry, the most arduous of the arts, we are less exacting.

Having only this single interest, the life of Tennyson is peculiarly orderly and develops in a natural series of sequent literary stages. Its first period extends from his birth in 1809 to the publication of "Poems Chiefly Lyrical" in 1830; its second to "In Memoriam" and the Laureateship in 1850; the third to the completion of the "Idylls of the King" about 1870; the fourth ends with his death in 1892, in which year he printed a volume of miscellaneous verse and another of plays. While each of these periods contains a wide variety of verse, the first is predominantly juvenile and imitative; the second, lyrical; the third, narrative; the fourth, dramatic. The subjects of the first period are romantic and unimportant, those of the second turn largely on problems of love and fate, those of the third on social questions, those of the fourth on history. We might characterize the four periods locally, according to Tennyson's place of residence; naming the first Somersby, the second London, the third Farringford, the

fourth Aldworth. Or we might group them around his chief associates: first his family, second his university friends, third his wife, fourth people of note. And each of these four modes of division will have an inherent connection with all the others.

In studying the opening careers of Tennyson and Browning, 1830–1833, it is well to notice how favorable was the time for a young poetic adventurer. From 1834 to 1844 the field was almost clear, the remarkable group who gave poetic glory to the first quarter of the century having passed away and those who were to be conspicuous during its second half not having yet arrived. Coleridge died in 1834. Keats, Shelley, Byron, Blake, Crabbe, Scott, Lamb, and Rogers had all gone before. Hunt, Moore, Southey, and Wordsworth lived on, but had almost ceased to write verse, while Arnold, Clough, Patmore, the Rossettis, Morris, and Swinburne published nothing till after 1844. The poets of the barren interval were respectable writers like Taylor, Talfourd, Hood, and the later Landor, with such popular favorites as P. J. Bailey and Robert Montgomery, none of them men likely to withdraw attention from a young poet of promise. Between the close of

one great poetic epoch and the coming of another a fortunate opportunity was offered for training the ear of England to new rhythms. This opportunity Tennyson seized, reaching full success with his volumes of 1842 and 1850. His equipment for the task and his steps toward its attainment I briefly describe.

Tennyson was born and grew to manhood far from cities, in the small village of Somersby, Lincolnshire. Its low-lying scenery he has often painted, particularly in "In Memoriam" and the "Ode to Memory" — its fat fields "trenched from sky to sky," its luxuriant trees, straight roads and, where the land approaches the sea, its rolling sand hills. A dozen miles away, at Mablethorpe on the coast, the Tennysons had a summer cottage, and here Alfred's passion for the sea began. At Somersby and the neighboring parish of Wood Enderby his father was the rector, a stern disappointed man; for his own father instead of leaving his large estates in customary fashion to him, the elder son, had alienated them to his younger brother and left him with small means. The injury always rankled. The sweetness of the large household — eight sons and four daughters — was centered in the mother, some

features of whose character Tennyson has sketched in "Isabel." Great physical hardihood was in the family; the father, Alfred, and one or two of the brothers being over six feet tall, and all but two of the twelve children living till past seventy. Still more marked was their intellectual power. The father was a graduate and LL.D. of Cambridge, a learned man, who had gathered a large library and early cultivated in his children a taste for art and literature. The girls were accomplished musicians, and most of the boys wrote poetry, criticizing each other's work while still children. Two of them, Frederic and Charles, published several volumes of verse and might have won distinction as poets had they not been overtopped by their brother. All became acquainted, even in childhood, with what is best in English poetry. In that secluded rectory there was no lack of stimulating society.

As regards Tennyson's early practice in verse, he told his son that when he was eight years old he wrote in praise of flowers under the influence of Thomson; that at eleven he imitated Pope's "Iliad," and a year later composed an epic of six thousand lines in the manner of Scott. His brothers were writing hardly

less. By the time Alfred was seventeen so considerable a stock was accumulated that Frederic, Charles, and he formed the project of a collected volume of their verse, persuaded a bookseller of the neighboring town of Louth to print it, and even to pay £21 for the privilege. It appeared in 1827. No names were attached and though all three writers were alike involved, it was curiously entitled "Poems by Two Brothers."

Seldom, I think, has a poet started at a farther remove from the goal he ultimately reaches. Of the Tennyson whom we know no one, however keen a critic, will detect a trace in that little volume. Of course boys have few ideas and are naturally imitative. It is not strange then that here we meet Byron, Moore, Scott, more frequently than the later Laureate. Byron, in particular, was at this time the idol of every romantic youth. When he died in 1824, Tennyson said the whole world seemed to be darkened for him. Yet it is strange that when Tennyson first appears he should not appear at all. We should expect that one of so distinctive a note would have sounded some prelude of it at once, especially since it is clearly heard only two years later in his prize

poem "Timbuctoo," and in every line of the volume of 1830 is unmistakable. The marvel is that he discovered himself so quickly after beginning in ignorance so complete. These early efforts, however, were valuable as giving a knack of verse, soon to be turned into a means of self-expression.

In 1829, the year in which "Timbuctoo" was published, Frederic Tennyson matriculated at Trinity College, Cambridge. The following year he was joined by Charles, a year younger than himself, and by Alfred, a year younger than Charles. Alfred had been prepared for the university by four unsatisfactory years at Louth School and by seven subsequent years of tuition under his father at home. He who hitherto had had few companions beside his brothers was now brought into close contact with a group of brilliant young men nearly all of whom subsequently attained literary fame. Spedding, Milnes, Merivale, Trench, Alford, and Hallam became Tennyson's intimate friends. FitzGerald was also at Cambridge at this time, but Tennyson did not make his acquaintance till several years later. Most of these men were members of the Society of Apostles, organized a few years earlier by F. D.

Maurice, and made up of the forward-looking minds of the university — reformers in politics, questioners in religion, impassioned for every species of literary and moral advance, and drawing much of their inspiration from foreign ideals, or from such importers of them as Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shelley, and Keats. Most of these young men wrote poetry and were eager in discussing its nature and office.

Arthur Henry Hallam was the golden youth of the company, looked up to by the rest in somewhat the same way as Sir Philip Sidney had been nearly three centuries before. The admiration lavished on him by all who crossed his path is difficult for us to understand. He reached no high academic rank, caring little for the mathematics and physics on which Cambridge lays its chief stress. His tastes were poetic and philosophic. He had a larger acquaintance with the Italian, French, and early English literatures than was common at that time. His death at twenty-two, his slender health and easy circumstances prevented him from trying his powers in any single book. The considerable body of miscellaneous prose and verse, published by his father, the historian, after his death, is judicious and accomplished,

altogether creditable for a youth of his years, but rarely distinguished. Yet acute judges, like Gladstone, Tennyson, and the critical circle with which he associated at the university counted him superior to all the men they knew. The charm was probably in the living personality, for he was singularly vital — beautiful in face, delightful in voice, exalted in character, impressively intellectual, swiftly sympathetic, possessed of all the graces that attend wealth and high station, together with entire simplicity and sweetness. These qualities made him profoundly loved, perhaps a little over estimated. Tennyson has minutely described his friend in "In Memoriam" (85 and 107–109), has described too the happy holidays spent together at Somersby, where Arthur became engaged to Tennyson's sister Emily ("In Memoriam," 86). In 1829 Tennyson and he contested for the Cambridge Prize Poem, won by Tennyson, and in the summer of 1830 went together on an audacious errand to Spain, carrying supplies to revolutionists there.

In 1830, too, Tennyson published his "Poems Chiefly Lyrical." A few shrewd reviewers were able to discern promise in the boyish volume, but it attracted little attention. Tennyson had

not yet acquired mastery of the type of poetry he would introduce. Early the following year, without taking a degree, he left Cambridge on account of the illness of his father, who died a few months later. At Somersby he remained, assuming the difficult financial charge of the family. And now for the next eleven years there fell upon him such a variety of afflictions and discouragements as would have crushed the spirit of any young poet less resolute than himself.

In the last months of 1832 a second volume of miscellaneous poems was published, whose greater maturity gave both Hallam and himself high hopes. Many excellent critics — Coleridge, J. S. Mill, Miss Barrett, FitzGerald, E. A. Poe — saw in it the work of a poet of importance; but the searching, almost ferocious, article in the "Quarterly," at that time a review of great influence, obscured for Tennyson all other approval. He was always morbidly sensitive to adverse criticism and unhappily the writer in the "Quarterly," probably Lockhart, had fastened on genuine blemishes. While Tennyson was smarting under the attack, Arthur Hallam died suddenly at Vienna, on September 15, 1833. The double

blow almost unmanned him, but he soon turned it to power. "Ulysses," he told his son, "was written soon after Arthur Hallam's death and gave my feeling about the need of going forward and braving the struggle of life." Now too the two deaths of those who were dearest to him, occurring as they did within two years of one another, brought before him that problem of immortality which was to engage his attention throughout his remaining life. Its twofold aspect he treated in a sort of staccato measure in "The Two Voices," and then began laying stone on stone in the monument for his friend which was not completed for seventeen years. The attack of the "Quarterly" he even turned to good account, making it his schoolmaster, searching out the truth of its cruel criticisms, elaborately revising the poems which had provoked it, and publishing nothing for ten years.

In 1837 the Tennysons were turned out of the Somersby Rectory. The parting seemed to Alfred like a new separation from Arthur ("In Memoriam," 98–101). For many years thereafter Tennyson had no settled home, the family occupying several houses under his charge in the vicinity of London, and he finding

his chief companionship with the friends of his Cambridge days. For general society he had always an aversion.

The year before the family left Somersby Charles Tennyson married Louisa Sellwood there. Her sister Emily was the bridesmaid, Alfred Tennyson the groomsman. Half a dozen years earlier they had met. The acquaintance now soon ripened into an engagement, which brought a brief brightness into these dark years. But in 1840, since marriage seemed impossible through lack of means, the engagement was broken and all correspondence between the pair forbidden (cf. "Love and Duty" and "Aylmer's Field"). What an extreme case is this of persistence in an artistic aim! For nine years after leaving the university Tennyson had undertaken no money-making employment. He would not enter upon any such now nor put aside his poetic purpose even to secure a desired marriage. His very disappointment over his early books had fixed an iron resolve to make his next unquestionable. This was to be a collection of his entire work, but with additions, omissions, and such extensive revision as almost to amount to rewriting. The poems were to be brought as near to pure gold

as ten years of critical elaboration could effect. And very near to pure gold they seemed when at last, in 1842, the two volumes were published. From that time nobody doubted that a great poet of a new type had arisen.

But while these two ripened volumes made his fame secure, they were attended by a financial catastrophe. In 1841 a certain Dr. Allen, a man of enthusiastic tongue and slender judgment, became acquainted with Tennyson and persuaded him to put all his own small property and much of his mother's into a process of mechanical wood-carving, invented by himself. Three years later the scheme was found to be utterly worthless and Tennyson lost all. "I have drunk," he writes, "one of those most bitter draughts out of the cup of life which go near to make men hate the world they move in" (cf. first section of "Maud" and "Sea Dreams"). In 1845 Milnes applied to Sir Robert Peel for aid, and relates that when Peel had read "Ulysses" he granted a pension of £200.

Henceforth the life of Tennyson is a series of successes. "The Princess" was published in 1847 and in what may be called Tennyson's climactic year, 1850, fell together the three

most important events of his life: "In Memoriam" was published, the Laureateship was conferred on him, and he was married to Emily Sellwood. "The peace of God came into my life when I wedded her," he afterwards said. She was his intellectual companion, his surest critic, his cheerful protector against the inner despondency and social annoyance from which he often suffered. They were married in the month in which "In Memoriam" appeared and visited Arthur Hallam's grave at Clevedon on their wedding journey.

I have examined these two periods of Tennyson's life with some minuteness because they were formative; in them all that distinguishes Tennyson comes to complete expression. The two periods which follow merely increase the bulk of his poetry according to patterns already set or, in departing from these, show him working with diminished power. The third and fourth periods, therefore, require from us no detailed examination. The third (1850–1870), probably the happiest of Tennyson's life, was spent in seclusion with his wife at Farringford, on the coast of the Isle of Wight. Here he turned more and more to social studies in narrative form, studies already begun in "The

Princess," continued in a survey of leadership as seen in "The Duke of Wellington," of the family tie in "Enoch Arden" and "Aylmer's Field," and of the ideal State in the "Idylls of the King." An epic on the legend of Arthur had been planned with Arthur Hallam and a section of it, the "Morte d'Arthur," had been written as early as 1835. However beautiful the completed "Idylls" are in parts, careful readers will feel them over-ornamented and over-moralized, dangers to which Tennyson was always liable. But they increased his popularity, as the work of his last period did not.

That consisted largely of plays. It was natural, praiseworthy even, that one so devoted to institutions and so profoundly an Englishman should follow his survey of society with dramas which, like the historical plays of Shakspere, exhibit crises in the development of his country. Such are "Harold," "Becket," "Queen Mary." Most poets at one time or another have a longing to be dramatists as well, and easily overlook differences in the requirements of the two arts. Tennyson showed splendid persistence in a mistaken course. A third of all his poetry consists of plays and to it he gave a quarter of his life. His early

experience had taught him to press through partial failure to ultimate success. But dramatic success he never attained. Any one of his plays, yes all of them, we would gladly exchange for another "Revenge," "Northern Farmer," "Lucretius," or "Lines to Virgil." A pessimistic attitude, too, toward modern conditions of society mars Tennyson's later work and is perhaps not unconnected with changes in his mode of life. As his fame increased, he became discontented with Farringford. It was too much exposed to the sight-seeing multitude and too remote from the celebrities who now sought him. The distractions of renown were as injurious to him as to Wordsworth. In 1880 he built himself the castle of Aldworth in Sussex and out of it came as little important poetry as had come from Rydal Mount. In 1883, with some misgivings, he accepted a peerage.

While Tennyson treats a wider range of subjects than any previous poet, to certain ones he gives a special prominence and has set on them his own distinctive mark. A few of his dominant ideas I name.

He is preëminently a poet of England. No one else has so movingly sung its ideals, its

history, its scenery, its political grandeur, its hallowed domestic life. He never mentions Germany, France he distrusts. He is less interested in Italy and America than in India. For good or for ill his sympathies are pretty strictly confined to his own country, where he passes his years contentedly with only brief excursions into a world beyond. Into England's soil his roots run deep through many generations. He is a product of its land system, its church, its universities. Institutions, the permanent and slowly elaborated organizations of society, nowhere more influential than in England, are what he honors. While for most of his life a liberal in politics, he dreads extremes and looks to the superior classes to guard the welfare of the inferior. It is the orderliness of his country which moves his admiration. England is

> "A land of settled government,
> A land of just and old renown,
> Where freedom broadens slowly down
> From precedent to precedent."

Tennyson, too, is the poet of married life. He does not conceive of love as a fine rapture of youthful hours, but as the source of the deepest and most constant happiness in life. It is,

if we may so say, the institutional aspects of love which he emphasizes — marriage, the home, the care of children. Notwithstanding occasional bursts of lyric feeling, as in "Move Eastward, Happy Earth," he does not as a rule sing of the intense moments of passion, like Burns, but with Wordsworth approves "the depth and not the tumult of the soul."

In his treatment of the great problems which agitated the nineteenth century Tennyson was almost a prophet. Before the idea of evolution had appeared as a scientific doctrine it was put forth by Tennyson hypothetically in "In Memoriam." The intellectual advancement of woman too (the evolution of half the human race) was announced by him before the question had even been seriously agitated. The fantastic dream of "The Princess" has become for us an every-day reality.

A problem of the age more central still was the question of the adjustment of the physical world to the personality of man. In the natural world we know there is "no variableness nor shadow of turning." Do similar mechanic forces direct our thinking and acting, or is there a spiritual principle within us not subject to the rigidity of law? How could a free being

exist in a locked-up world? How is it that we control the fixed sequences of nature? Tennyson met these grave questions equipped with a wider knowledge of science than any previous or contemporary English poet, and on the whole held to the spiritual side in the great argument, convinced that man does overrule the sequences of nature, that from him new sequences even begin. In taking this unfashionable position he again anticipated a change in public opinion. Up to 1875 the mechanistic conception was in the ascendant. Since that date a considerable reaction has set in. Scientific men have more and more perceived that some provision must exist in the universe for coördinating forces unlike mechanic agencies. Both tendencies of thought Tennyson recognized as important, felt both stirring strongly within himself, and yet to the last remained, like Browning, a profoundly religious man.

One religious doctrine I have already mentioned as agitating Tennyson from the very beginning of his career, the doctrine of immortality. Throughout life he regarded it as more fundamental than any other and came to feel a sense of passionate loyalty in maintaining it. Doubt about it he figured as a kind of deser-

tion. It led him to a sober interest in psychic phenomena of all sorts, especially since from childhood he had been subject to a peculiar trance state or auto-hypnotism. To this he refers in every period of his writing. A first sketch of it is given in "The Mystic," printed among the "Poems Chiefly Lyrical": —

> "He often lying broad awake, and yet
> Remaining from the body and apart
> In intellect and power and will, hath heard
> Time flowing in the middle of the night,
> And all things creeping to a day of doom."

In his middle period it formed an essential element of "The Princess," appearing there half a dozen times and receiving the name of "the weird seizure." Near the close of his life it is presented with peculiar solemnity in the final sections of "The Ancient Sage." It would seem that in Tennyson's mind the state of consciousness thus described formed a kind of connecting link between this life and the next.

Although man is the chief theme of Tennyson's poetry, no poet has scrutinized nature more closely. Wordsworth surveys a scene as a whole and with reference to its effect on our feelings. He does not, like the naturalist, inspect its details. Tennyson, on the contrary,

observes physical facts with a minuteness probably unmatched by any English poet except Shakspere. Generally, however, the natural scene so studied is used as merely a background for human activity. "The Dying Swan," "The Black Bird," "The Lines on Early Spring" are poems of pure nature. What others are there? Tennyson accepts the romantic principle of a correspondence between nature and mind and hence his outward scene is usually colored by the inner mood. The pathetic fallacy he carries to great extremes.

Such, then, are the splendid themes with which Tennyson's poetry is charged. I put them all aside as having little to do with the design of this book. They are by no means peculiar to Tennyson nor is he likely to gain permanent life through their presentation. The dominant ideas of any poet are of transient interest. What is novel to one generation becomes commonplace to the next. If a poet is to secure permanence, it must be by a contribution of larger value than these Tennysonian ideas. I, at least, have undertaken to present only those features of my half-dozen poets in which they become typical, that is, mark an epoch and enlarge the bounds of English poetry

by introducing something which it had not known before. What contributions then has Tennyson made of this distinctive kind?

Arthur Hallam shall answer. When the crude and mannered little volume of "Poems Chiefly Lyrical" appeared in 1830, Hallam was one of the few to discern in it signs of future power. In a review contributed to the "Englishman's Magazine" he calls attention to five distinct characteristics of Tennyson's verse. These I briefly summarize as (1) its elevation of tone, (2) its luxuriance of imagination, (3) its variety of measures and subtle adaptation of sound to sense, (4) its concentration on single moods, (5) the magic of its resulting pictures. Here in a few sentences Hallam indicates with astonishing accuracy the advance which Tennyson was to bring about in English poetry. Especially noticeable are the third and fourth points, Tennyson's reconstitution of the technique of our verse and his handling of character. To a consideration of these I devote the remainder of this chapter.

We all know two contrasted types of poets: the one which under the impulse of feeling pours that feeling forth in unpremeditated

song, and the other which studies the emotional material and shapes it into an object of enduring beauty. Tennyson is of the latter sort. He is ever a conscious artist, belonging to the family of Virgil, Petrarch, Milton, Keats, rather than to that of Homer, Ariosto, Burns, Shelley. He is an elaborate student of poetry and no improvisatore, though he misleadingly declares

> "I do but sing because I must,
> And pipe but as the linnet sings."

From him we do not get the swift and happy spontaneities which we enjoy in Burns. In his first volumes there was perhaps something of the "fine careless rapture." But we have seen how, because this met with reproof, Tennyson entered on ten years of self-scrutiny which gave him the fixed critical habits by which his meaningful poetry was henceforth fashioned. "I was nearer thirty than twenty before I was anything of an artist," he told his son. His later successes are the results of deliberate purpose, careful workmanship, severe and repeated revision; but all carried to so high a pitch that the harmonious outcome affects us as a species of magic.

It will be well to examine this poetic artistry

with some care because it is that which in the long run is likely to give Tennyson survival value. How fully he has reflected on his art and how seriously he takes it may be seen in his many poems on the poet's office. I count fifteen such. He has half a dozen experiments in Greek metres and several in Saxon. Having, too, a passion for perfection and knowing it can seldom be reached by first thoughts, he frankly alters his lines in the face of the public, rarely without improvement. "The Palace of Art," for example, first appeared in 1833. In 1842 twenty-seven of its seventy-six stanzas were struck out and sixteen new ones added. In 1850 and 1851 there were further additions and omissions; while of minor changes in word or line carried on through this period I count nearly fifty. Similar emendations occur in nearly all his work. Only Wordsworth among previous English poets ever revised in this fashion, and Wordsworth's changes were not always for the better. The study of Tennyson's varying text is a lesson in poetic artistry.

Hallam rightly praises the variety and fitness of Tennyson's measures. Perhaps the most notable instance is the measure of "In Memoriam," a marvel of adaptation. How lingeringly

brooding is its mournful music, yet how readily stanza links with stanza! No abrupt break occurs, no forceful culmination; but the close rhymes of the middle lines, in connection with the distant ones of the first and last, both emphasize and distribute the grief with a peculiar poignancy. The stanza is generally thought to be Tennyson's own and to have been formed for this specific purpose. Yet he experimented with it in three poems, first published in 1842 and written about 1833, at the time when he was considering "In Memoriam" — "The Blackbird," "Of Old sat Freedom," and "Love thou thy land" — the first strangely out of accord with the massive feeling later judged appropriate. In "The Princess," accompanying the stanza with a refrain, he used it for the passionate song "Ask me no more." Though Tennyson, too, supposed himself to have invented the stanza, four or five cases of it have been pointed out in our earlier poetry, the most remarkable being one by Lord Edward Herbert, the brother of George Herbert. This, curiously enough, deals with the same problem and emotion as "In Memoriam," and is entitled "An Ode on a Question Moved Whether Love Shall Continue Forever."

But the "In Memoriam" stanza is only one among many metric felicities of Tennyson. How superbly fitting to the large and vague aspirations of "Locksley Hall" is the fifteen-syllabled trochaic sweep of its couplet! That excessive sweetness which has given popular currency to "The May Queen" is as truly in the management of its fourteen-syllabled line as in its sickly sentiment. On the other hand, think of the sturdiness of "The Oak," the sternly insistent "Charge of the Light Brigade," the swift simplicity of "Sir Galahad," the meditative refinement of the "Lines to Virgil," the massive iterations of "Merlin and the Gleam." When Hallam speaks of "the exquisite modulation of Tennyson's words and cadences to the swell and fall of the feelings expressed," we recall the diversified sections of "Maud," the changing cadences of "The Lotos-Eaters" and "The Revenge."

Perhaps the subtlety of Tennyson's "fingering" of his line may best be seen by a comparison of seemingly similar poems. On reading "The Daisy" and the "Lines to F. D. Maurice," any one will be likely to call the novel and beautiful measures the same, though the two poems produce a distinct difference in the

feeling experienced. On examination the latter will be found to have two dactyls in the last line of each stanza; "The Daisy" but one. Comparison on a broader scale may be had in the measures of "The Palace of Art," "The Dream of Fair Women," the "Lines to Mary Boyle," and "The Poet," where small divergencies from a common form give widely unlike effects.

Where one constant measure is employed, as strikingly in blank verse, great variety is still secured. Sound and sense are suitably adjusted by making the movement slow or swift through clogged or smooth syllables, by allowing lines to run over or stopping them at the end, and by variations in the central pause. No device is too small to escape Tennyson's notice, yet none obtrudes. Each is welded into support of all the rest. By studying small adjustments Tennyson developed a blank verse more flexible and sensitive than any poet except Milton had known before. A single passage from "Œnone" will show what delicious music a master can draw from a common instrument.

> "There lies a vale in Ida, lovelier
> Than all the valleys of Ionian hills.
> The swimming vapor slopes athwart the glen,

And loiters, slowly drawn. On either hand
The lawns and meadow-ledges midway down
Hang rich in flowers, and far below them roars
The long brook, falling through the cloven ravine
In cataract after cataract to the sea.
Behind the valley topmost Gargarus
Stands up and takes the morning; but in front
The gorges, opening wide apart, reveal
Troas and Ilion's columned citadel,
The crown of Troas."

Let one recall for contrast the barbaric chant of allegiance in "The Coming of Arthur" and it will be seen how Tennyson can "sing to one clear harp in divers tones."

I have no need to examine in detail his minor poetic subtleties — his frequent and impressive repetitions of word or phrase, his keying a passage to a certain emotional tone by the use of appropriate vowel sounds, his strengthening important words by alliterated consonants, his substitution of a trochee for an iambus in his first foot, or of three short syllables for a short and a long wherever a livelier movement would be welcome. These niceties have been sufficiently remarked by the critics. Occasionally, perhaps, he is too obvious in alliteration. The famous couplet closing "The Princess," "small sweet Idyl,"

"The moan of doves in immemorial elms,
And murmuring of innumerable bees,"

shows by its fame its independence of the context and consequently its weakness. In general, however, Tennyson is a good teacher of the technique of verse. Since all that he does is intentional, he can be tracked more easily than an intuitive poet; and usually he finds his way through trial and error to a sound and beautiful result.

But while this technical excellence is, in my judgment, what is most likely to insure length of days to Tennyson, he is not, like Poe, Swinburne, and Bridges, merely a technician. What he says is important as well as his mode of saying it. He marks an advance of the naturalistic movement toward the depicting of individual character. We have seen how the Romanticist turned away from the generalities of Classicism, prizing the specific fact, the specific experience, the specific person. But this new valuation of the world, though it lay deep in Wordsworth, was incompletely carried out by him. The presentation of individual character is the hardest of poetic tasks. It cannot be said that Wordsworth ever accomplished it. He is so much occupied with setting forth those primal instincts which he believes to be the support of every good man that he pays little heed

to the shifting moods of the single human being. In Tennyson that minute observation of the individual at which Romanticism aimed first reaches expression. An actual person, as he walks the street, is a unique compound of both good and evil, built up out of racial instincts, parental inheritance, social environment, accidental circumstance, with a dash of idiosyncracy, and the whole more or less vaguely directed toward certain ideal ends. No individual is quite consistent or altogether classifiable. Yet in spite of his wayward variety, Romanticists rightly count him the one being of value in the universe.

Now in Wordsworth the moral interest is so strong that scanty justice is done to the complexity of human nature. Wordsworth never fully broke with Classicism, and most of his characters remain types. Michael himself is the typical dalesman, with few accidental or distinctive traits. Perhaps those who come nearest in Wordsworth's poetry to living and breathing persons are Peter Bell, Ruth, and Margaret of "The Excursion." But even they are shadowy.

The most important work of Wordworth's two great continuers, Tennyson and Browning,

was to be done in this field of realistic psychology. Their methods were unlike. Hallam notes in Tennyson "his power of embodying himself in ideal characters, or rather moods of character, with such accuracy of adjustment that the circumstances of the narrative seem to have a natural correspondence with the predominant feeling and, as it were, to be evolved from it by assimilation." Tennyson's method of composition could hardly be more justly stated. It is his distinction to have introduced into English poetry a new kind of portrait-painting, the portraiture not of any man as a whole but of some single mood, into which for the moment all the man's character and all his surroundings are absorbed. These single moods, abstract and ideal though they are and not confined to any one individual, are then supplied with an extremely realistic setting from which everything which does not heighten the effect is carefully excluded. The method is so characteristic and important as to require detailed illustration. It was early employed. In his first volume, of 1830, it was put forth in a form so extreme as to bewilder and repel the public. Tennyson soon made it less obtrusive, but applied it steadily henceforth in softened

form in all his best work. His poems are a museum of separate moods. Whenever he attempted a rounded and integral character, he failed — as in King Arthur, Enoch Arden, or Harold. Perhaps those who come nearest to recognizable human beings are Guinevere, the Northern Farmer, and the hero of "Maud." Yet even these represent rather typical mental attitudes than concrete persons.

In 1830 Tennyson printed "Mariana." The theme was to be desolation; and how could that incommunicable mood be better painted than in the figure of a deserted girl in a lone farmstead of the fens? A single poplar marks the spot. The water in the trench which drains the surrounding marsh is black and slimy. The flower pots are thick with mould. The thatch of the house is worn. The nails are rusted, and the fruit tree is falling from the wall to which it had been trained. Everything is in decay. The shrill wind is heard without, and in the early morning bears along an occasional crow of cock, low of cattle, or whir of bat. Within the house the only sounds are the ticking clock, the wainscot mouse, the fly on the window-pane; the only voice the sob of the forsaken girl. Of her circumstances we know

nothing; of herself nothing except her utter loneliness, and this reported not so much by her words as by the morbid objects in which we see her isolation. No doubt the picture is over-charged, as are the companion pictures of Lilian, Madeline, and the rest. But these slender girls will not appear so silly when we regard them not as full-length portraits of character, but as early experiments in a method of evolving from a predominant mood, as Hallam says, the circumstances which correspond with it. About the worth of these moods Tennyson is not primarily concerned. Enough for him that they exhibit a genuine phase of humanity.

Illustrations of the same method on a larger scale, and worked out with more subtlety and increased dramatic power, are to be found in "The Lotos-Eaters" and "Ulysses." The desire for rest belongs to each of us. What situation will display it most fully? What better than the luxuriant island where, after ten years' struggle with tempestuous seas, the companions of Ulysses land, taste the soporific fruit, and doubt the worth of further endeavor? By every artifice of scene and sound Tennyson compels us into sympathy with

repose. But for strenuosity he does as much in Ulysses. After losing Arthur Hallam, as I have already said, he was tempted for a time to sink into inaction; then remembering the quenchless energy which Dante attributes to Ulysses, he roused himself to throw off the listlessness of the home-circle and once more to "seek a newer world" of art. He may be said to have "touched the Happy Isles" in his volumes of 1842. But what full justice is done to the contrasted moods! The limitations of each which would be necessary in real life are here omitted. The glory of each we are made to feel in its detachment, the smooth-flowing insinuating style of the one is set in contrast with the harsh energy of the other. This is the distinctive method of Tennyson. We wrong him in demanding from him rounded figures of men and women. He gives us actuality as the Romanticists had urged; but it is fragmentary actuality, subtle studies of psychologic moods. So had Milton studied gladness and sobriety, and in his "Allegro" and "Penseroso" assembled from the living world whatever feeds the special temper of each.

It might seem that such a method would

be applicable to brief poems only; but Tennyson uses it in serial form to fashion long ones also, and several of these are among his best. The rooms and pictures of "The Palace of Art" reflect the conflicting moods of its solitary inhabitant:

> "Full of great rooms and small the palace stood,
> All various, each a perfect whole
> From living nature, fit for every mood
> And change of my still soul."

In "The Dream of Fair Women": —

> "Shape chases shape as swift as, when to land
> Bluster the winds and tides the selfsame way,
> Crisp foam-flakes scud along the level sand,
> Torn from the fringe of spray."

In "The Vision of Sin" the moody sections are parted by the five times repeated stanza beginning "Fill the cup and fill the can." And though in "Locksley Hall" the moods are less sharply sundered, it is their sequence which gives its clamorous unity to the poem.

In meditating on immortality our emotions are peculiarly open to change. We can hardly contemplate that many-sided mystery with an even mind. Tennyson follows our wavering hopes with as much system as they will bear in "The Two Voices"; but in "In Me-

moriam" he abandons all connection, sets each mood entirely free and allows it space to tinge with emotion a considerable portion of the outer and inner world. Each section thus becomes the accurate embodiment of a single mood, the whole forming a kind of compendium of sorrow. In "Maud" the moods of the sequent sections are more varied and dramatic and the total monologue possesses greater unity, though the subject awakens less sympathy. In these two poems Tennyson's method reaches its completest expression. By it a new type of poetry is formed, a type peculiarly intimate. The Romantic movement advances into regions more free from conventionality and richer in personal experience than any predecessor had explored.

It is natural that after their death reaction should set in against such poetic sovereigns as Pope and Tennyson. The latter's poetic craftsmanship and psychological subtlety are not the qualities most prized by men of today. We underrate the enormous enrichment which Tennyson has given to our poetry and overestimate the limitations which such merits as his involve. A brief statement of those limitations will enable the reader to under-

stand why English poetry could not pause where Tennyson left it.

Tennyson is entirely a poet of the inner life, and of that life exhibited in its most personal and shifting phases. While his observations of nature are extraordinarily exact and varied, he rarely erects them into themes for verse, but holds them as decorations and backgrounds. Such preoccupation with emotion easily goes over into sentimentalism and morbidity, especially in an age constitutionally disposed to pride itself on its sensitiveness in matters of feeling. Mid-Victorianism took itself pretty seriously. Its "earnest" writers seem incapable of losing themselves in objective interests. They introspect a great deal which is not worth inspection. And Tennyson reflects pretty fully the strength and weaknesses of a time which it pleases us to think we have outgrown.

On account, too, of the very method which gives him his greatest claim to originality, Tennyson's men and women never seem quite real beings but rather dream-creatures, embodiments of a single feeling, quite too fine and frail for the working world. A hearty laugh would blow most of them to pieces.

Many feel — I do not — that Tennyson is too conscious in workmanship, that his poems are not "chiefly lyrical," but are thought-products where nothing is left to the impulse of the moment. These cavillers wish he would occasionally show a little recklessness and "snatch a grace beyond the reach of art." This is to ask that a man's genius be changed to yield what belongs to a different temperament. Where a certain type of genius is so nearly supreme and precious, it is well to welcome its products and look elsewhere for those of another sort. Yet no doubt the tendency to elaboration exposes Tennyson to one of his gravest dangers, an over luxuriance of style. He who sets out consciously to construct beauty may easily miss its simple charm and produce something which we feel to be too highly perfumed. It is a danger which Tennyson shares with the whole Romantic School. From it the Classicist is saved by making clearness and unity outrank all other literary excellence.

I am far from enumerating in this chapter all the virtues of Tennyson. On the contrary, my aim has been to fix attention on merely two, his consummate craftsmanship and his

delineation of specific moods. But apart from merits like these, and in qualities which all poets in some degree alike possess, Tennyson is preëminent. Few writers employ a diction so largely monosyllabic or can pack so much matter into so few words. Then too beyond all other modern poets he has the power of the magic phrase. On every page gleams some sentence, unmistakably his, which stirs in us some such pleasure as does a conceit of Donne's, though substituting elusive ease for manifest effort. If in an anonymous volume we should fall upon this description of Enid,

> "But o'er her meek eyes came a happy mist,
> Like that which kept the heart of Eden green
> Before the useful trouble of the rain"

should we not delightedly exclaim "Tennyson, and no other!"

SUGGESTIONS FOR READING

Of the earlier poems, read "The Miller's Daughter," "The Lady of Shalott," "The Palace of Art," "The Lotos-Eaters," "Ulysses," "Locksley Hall," "Sir Galahad," "The Brook," "A Farewell."

From the middle period: "The Daisy," "Ode on the Duke of Wellington," "The Northern Farmer," "The Flower," "Flower in the Crannied Wall," "Wages," "The Higher Pantheism."

From the later period: "The Revenge," "To Virgil," "Early Spring," "The Oak," "Merlin and the Gleam," "Crossing the Bar.

Tennyson's interpolated songs are so characteristic that a few must be mentioned. From "The Princess": "As thro' the land"; "Blow, bugle, blow"; "Tears, idle tears"; "Ask me no more"; "Come down, O maid." From the "Idylls": "Blow, trumpet," from "The Coming of Arthur"; "Turn, Fortune," from "The Marriage of Geraint"; "In Love, if love be love," from "Merlin and Vivien"; "Late, late, too late," from "Guinevere."

Some of Tennyson's best metrical work is in "Maud." Of the "Idylls" probably "Elaine" is the usual favorite. "In Memoriam" is of such even excellence that there is no need of commending single sections to a young reader. Read anywhere.

Tennyson studies the moods of nature as searchingly as he does those of mankind. His practice might be well illustrated by gathering what he has said about trees, clouds, or stars. But perhaps the accuracy and variety of his observation are most impressive in his sea pieces. Of these I print a fragmentary collection:

TENNYSON'S SEA PIECES

But while the two were sleeping, a full tide
Rose with ground swell, which on the foremost rocks
Touching, upjetted in spirts of wild sea smoke
And scaled in sheets of wasteful foam and fell
In vast sea cataracts — ever and anon
Dead claps of thunder from within the cliffs
Heard thro' the living roar.

I heard the water lapping on the crag,
And the long ripple washing in the reeds.

And watch the curled white of the coming wave
Glassed in the slippery sand before it breaks.

The points of the foam in the dusk came playing about
our feet.

The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks,
The long day wanes, the slow moon climbs, the deep
Moans round with many voices.

The league-long roller, thundering on the reef.

The hollow ocean-ridges, roaring into cataracts.

The great waters break
Whitening for half a league, and thin themselves,
Far over sands marbled with moon and cloud,
From less and less to nothing.

The myriad roaring ocean, light and shadow illimitable.

Roared as when the roaring breakers boom and blanch
on the precipices.

The waste voice of the bond-breaking sea.

As on a dull day in an ocean cave
The blind wave feeling round his long sea hall
In silence.

The bay was oily calm; the harbor buoy
With one green sparkle ever and anon
Dipt by itself, and we were glad at heart.

The liquid azure bloom of a crescent of sea,
The silent sapphire-spangled marriage ring of the land.

I would the white cold plunging foam,
Whirled by the wind, had rolled me deep below
Then when I left my home.

A still salt pool, locked in with bars of sand,
  Left on the shore; that hears all night
The plunging seas draw backward from the land
  Their moon-led waters white.

  A wild wave in the wide North Sea,
Green-glimmering toward the summit, bears with all
Its stormy crests that smoke against the skies
Down on a bark, and overbears the bark
And him that helms it.

Listening now to the tide in its broad-flung shipwrecking
      roar,
Now to the scream of a maddened beach dragged down
      by the wave.

The sharp wind that ruffles all day long
A little bitter pool about a stone
On a bare coast.

As one that climbs a peak to gaze
O'er land and main, and sees a great black cloud
Drag inward from the deeps, a wall of night,
Blot out the slope of sea from verge to shore,
And suck the blinding splendor from the sand,
And quenching lake by lake and tarn by tarn,
Expunge the world.

A ripple on the boundless deep
Feels that the deep is boundless, and itself
Forever changing form, but evermore
One with the boundless motion of the deep.

A full sea glazed with muffled moonlight.

Lift up thy rocky face
And shelter when the storms are black
In many a streaming torrent back
The seas that shock thy base.

The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls.

Far ran the naked moon across
The houseless ocean's heaving field.

They watched the great sea fall,
Wave after wave, each mightier than the last,
Till last a ninth one, gathering half the deep
And full of voices, slowly rose and plunged
Roaring, and all the wave was in a flame.

One showed an iron coast and angry waves,
You seemed to hear them rise and fall
And roar rock-thwarted under bellowing caves
Beneath the windy wall.

But such a tide as moving seems asleep,
Too full for sound and foam,
When that which drew from out the boundless
deep
Turns again home.

VIII

Robert Browning

VIII

ROBERT BROWNING

HARDLY another poet in the whole course of English literature has met with such violent and continuous partisanship as Robert Browning. When Wordsworth put forth his epoch-making little volume of "Lyrical Ballads," he too met derision, but it lasted only twenty years. By the time he reached middle age his position as a master was assured, and his limitations were well understood. Over Browning disputation has continued longer. Throughout his life and during the quarter-century since his death he has had ardent assailants and just as ardent defenders. Persons of standing declare the man a barbarian, who broke into the fair fields of verse with poetry cacophonous in sound, obscure in expression, and shocking in subject. On the other hand, there are those who regard Browning as half divine. He is a prophet, they say, and has so disclosed to them the significance of their personal lives that they cannot hear any criticism of him without a shiver. Sometimes Browning is set

up in laudatory antagonism to Tennyson, or Tennyson in antagonism to Browning, and certainly these poets do differ fundamentally. But are their differences disparaging or supplemental? I believe I shall find the safest approach to my heated subject if, without praise or blame, I coolly note some of the points of contrast between the two.

Tennyson is English for many generations; Browning is of compound nationality. Tennyson lived in England and found his subjects there; Browning lived long on the continent and gathered his subjects from everywhere except England. Tennyson is a university man; Browning had a miscellaneous education. Tennyson is acquainted with physical science; Browning only with literature, many literatures. Tennyson's life is rooted in institutions; Browning cares little for them. Tennyson has a strong interest in the social and religious questions of his age; Browning only in the problem of self-development. Through many generations Tennyson was connected with the Established Church; Browning, his parents, and his wife were Congregationalists. Tennyson was an idealistic recluse; Browning a realistic man of the world.

Tennyson's figures are generalized; Browning's particularized. Tennyson's favorite time is that of the mediæval myth; Browning's the later Renaissance. Tennyson aims at beauty, through approved and standard language; Browning at force and expressiveness. Tennyson chooses for subjects graceful and harmonious incidents; Browning unusual and startling ones. Tennyson is the conscious artist, ever correcting; Browning the spontaneous improvisatore. Tennyson has an exceptional mastery of poetic technique; Browning is rugged and bizarre. Tennyson has many of the traits of a refined and timid woman; Browning is all manliness and optimism. Tennyson was a dramatist at the end of his life; Browning at the beginning.

What amazing contrasts are here! Yet the two poets never conceived of themselves as rivals. On the contrary, Tennyson inscribed his "Tiresias" thus: "To my good friend, Robert Browning, whose genius and geniality will best appreciate what may be best, and make most allowance for what is worst, this volume is affectionately dedicated." And Browning had earlier written in his volume of "Selections" these careful words: "Dedi-

cated to Alfred Tennyson. In poetry — illustrious and consummate. In friendship — noble and sincere." It will not then become us to take sides in the fictitious antagonism. Rather, in considering Browning, we must lay aside partisanship and endeavor — however contentious be the ground — to inquire dispassionately what Browning stands for. What is his type?

To determine this, let us for a moment turn back to the Classicists, as their work culminated in Pope, and recall how largely with them poetry was removed from ordinary life, from the life at least of the individual. It was a social affair. Its figures were cultivated men and women who appear conversing with their kind. Literature accordingly stood, as it were, somewhat apart from ordinary existence, having its own laws, its own diction. It was not called on to mirror my life or your life, or to use the language of our homes. Of course as time went on, and especially as the followers of Pope cheapened his refined standards, there came a revolt, and individual life was declared to be the important thing. When then Wordsworth, as the leader of this Romantic Movement, sets

out to depict the actualities of experience, we should expect him to bring before us men and women as we find them on the street. But this he did not do. While turning away from artificial human nature and studying with penetrating veracity genuine persons, he was chiefly interested in those central emotions which build up homes and states, and rather oblivious to such momentary changes as, going on in all of us, differentiate man from man. Precisely to these Tennyson devotes himself and thus gives to naturalistic verse a psychological depth it had not previously known. But he studies moods rather than persons. The single phases of humanity so vividly set forth by him do not properly belong to John, Thomas, or Susan, but are universal, though temporary, aspects of any human being. The companions of Ulysses whom we meet in Lotus Land cannot be distinguished from one another. Edward Gray's melancholy over Ellen Adair might as well have been that of Peter Robinson for Mary Brown. How characterless is Maud! "Dead perfection, no more." The delightful Grandmother is so grandmotherly as to belong to no special race, time, or village. All these

people are abstractions, representative of single traits, with as little blood in them as any figure of Ben Jonson's or Dickens'. Novelists — Richardson, Fielding, Scott, Miss Austen — had long before made their readers acquainted with total human beings. But none such had yet appeared in poetry, unless in the pages of that half poet, half novelist, Crabbe. Neither Byron, Shelley, nor Keats knows anything of living men and women.

There is then something still to be done if poetry will listen to Wordsworth's call, and, abandoning conventions, deal with the realities of common life. Whoever can make us feel the complex and unstable unity of an individual person will introduce a new and highly important type into English poetry. This is the aim of Browning, and from it spring most of his peculiarities. Announcement of that aim is made in the preface to "Sordello," where he writes: "My stress lay on the incidents in the development of a soul. Little else is worth study." Accordingly Browning pays the least possible attention to outward nature. Only two or three of his poems set forth nature at all. There is "De Gustibus," "The Englishman in Italy," and

"Home Thoughts from Abroad." Is there another in which nature is the theme, or even where, as in Tennyson, nature forms a sympathetic background for human action? Browning's figures need no background. They stand firmly on their own feet. The disposition then to turn to individual life and, without apology or attempt to justify the choice of subject by any lesson it might teach; simply to say, "The precious thing in all the world is the personal being. Whatever he does and says deserves attention" — this democratic individualism is what gives distinction to Browning, though it was also the special gospel of his age. Carlyle, Emerson, Arnold, John Stuart Mill, George Eliot, were all proclaiming it. Browning gives it appropriate form in poetry. The circumstances of his life shaped him admirably for the work.

That life is six years shorter than Tennyson's, beginning three years later and ending three years earlier; that is, it extends from 1812 to 1889. It divides itself into four periods, in close parallelism to those of Tennyson. Like his too they are entirely literary periods, not periods formed by outward events. The first we may call his Juvenile

period, from his birth to 1828, a momentous date in Browning's life; for he then fell in with the poems of Shelley. The second is his period of Experiment, from 1828 to 1840 or 1842, the publication of the "Bells and Pomegranates." Then comes his period of Mastery, when at last he has found himself, knows exactly what his work in the world is to be, and sets eagerly about it. This period runs from the "Bells and Pomegranates" to "The Ring and the Book" in 1870 — or if we will be exact, 1869. The last is his period of Decline and Sophistry, from 1870 to 1889. Of this last I shall say little, except that, while it contains many bits of vigorous verse, his fame would, in my judgment, be more secure if all written after "The Ring and the Book" could be struck out. It is the early periods which require attention. If we would rightly measure Browning's subsequent stature, we must carefully observe his growth.

He was a city boy, born at Camberwell, a suburb of London. In cities he always made his home, using the country merely for occasional refreshment. Tennyson spent three quarters of his life in the country; by birth and education he is connected with the ruling

class. Browning belongs with the average multitude. Probably his great-grandfather was a waiter at a country inn. His grandfather came to London, entered the service of the Bank of England, and rose rapidly to prominence and considerable wealth. From sharing in this wealth his second wife cut off the children of the first marriage. Browning's father was therefore obliged to care for himself and was unable to obtain a university education. He too became a clerk in the Bank of England, where by diligence he ultimately attained something more than a competence. Having always an eager desire for knowledge, he accumulated a library of six or seven thousand volumes and was able to use books in French, German, and Italian. He was a genial man, fond of drawing and writing stories, and had always a special fancy for whatever was curious and unusual.

I have called Browning a man of composite ancestry, and the fact affected, I believe, the interests of his whole life. His father was an Englishman, his mother a Scotch woman, her father a German merchant of Hamburg. His own father's mother was a Creole from the West Indies. Four nationalities contribute to

the formation of this extraordinary man; and it has been surmised, though on slender evidence, that there was also Jewish blood in him. May not these diversities within himself have broadened his sympathies and fitted him more readily than would have been possible had he been thoroughly an Englishman, to comprehend and create the many strange creatures who move across his pages?

His education was similarly miscellaneous. The atmosphere of his home was literary, and his own early literary tastes were strong. But they were entirely unguided by the restraints and standards of a university or even of continuous schooling. For only a few years at a time was he connected with any school. For less than a year when he was fifteen he attended a Greek class at London University. From that time his father's library was, as it had always really been, his chief source of intellectual nourishment. His constant reading of unusual books made him self-educated and a scholar. Music too he loved, and under the stimulating guidance of his friend, Eliza Flower, he became an adept in musical science. Strange that one of the harshest of modern poets should also be one of the most accomplished in music!

Early in life he showed a taste for poetry and began to write it. His father had been bred in the Classical tradition and looked with disfavor on Romanticism. His library was rich too in the Metaphysical poets. Quarles and Donne early became favorites of young Browning. By the time he was twelve years old he had written a little volume of verse, which he desired to publish under the title of "Incondita." Thus early appears the taste for fantastic titles. The manuscript was submitted to the critical judgment of a London editor, Rev. W. G. Fox, who advised against its publication, and it was destroyed. But it brought him, besides a wise critic, two deeply valued friends introduced by Mr. Fox, the Misses Flower. Both wrote verse; Sarah, the younger, being the author of the hymn, "Nearer, my God, to thee," and the elder, Eliza, nine years older than Browning, continuing for a long time the object of his romantic devotion. Her he idealized in Pauline. When in boyhood he declared that he wished to devote his life to poetry, his indulgent parents did not gainsay him. He accordingly was prepared for no profession, but in his father's library took all literature for his province.

In 1828 something momentous happened. Browning came upon a copy of Shelley's "Queen Mab," and persuaded his mother to give him the rest of Shelley's poems on his next birthday. A new conception of poetry was now opened to him. Byron he had known before. But Shelley disclosed to him the full freedom of Romanticism, its mysticism, its magical music, its penetrating exploration of the human soul. Yet I cannot help thinking that he, like Tennyson, made a false start. Shelley's genius and his own were at the farthest possible remove. Tennyson, after gaining a certain fluency from Byron, withdrew promptly and unharmed to his own proper field. But Browning spent nearly ten years over the impossible task of writing pieces as shapeless as those of Shelley. He always felt gratitude for the one who first awoke him, but after 1840 abandoned him as a guide.

We all know the twofold character of Shelley. He is the inspired lyrist, panting forth a flood of rapture so divine as few poets of plaintive passion have equalled in any land. And then he is the creator of "Queen Mab," "Alastor," and the rest of that ungainly crew, who at inordinate length preach the theories

of Godwin and the dreams of the French Revolution. The lyric Shelley, the seer, lay obviously beyond Browning's reach; but in the expository Shelley, the teacher, there was something which for a time strongly attracted him. In pursuit of it he wrote "Pauline," "Paracelsus," "Sordello" — all attempts, as he says in the preface to "Sordello," to trace through successive stages the development of a soul. The long poem, with this sort of Pilgrim's Progress as its subject, was much in the fashion of the day. Shelley's "Alastor" gave it impetus among the intellectuals, Bailey's "Festus" among the populace. Wordsworth shaped it into a masterpiece in his "Prelude." No wonder that Browning, who was to become a closer student of character than any previous poet, felt himself drawn to it at the beginning of his career. In 1833, three years after Tennyson's "Poems Chiefly Lyrical" appeared (and it will be remembered that there was three years' difference in the ages of the two poets), Browning put forth "Pauline," following her in 1835 with "Paracelsus," and in 1840 with "Sordello." In each of these, by different methods, he attempted to trace the formation of a particu-

lar individual throughout the entire extent of his life; to see him aspiring, failing, groping and ever moving from a small understanding of himself and the world to a large. All these books were published at the expense of members of Browning's family, and all failed. Few copies were sold and little notice of them was taken. Here and there were readers intrepid enough to find their way through the literary jungle to merit. But they were naturally few.

Already, however, in 1837 the actor Macready thought he could detect underneath the intricacies of Browning's early books a talent for portraying character. He asked Browning for a play, and "Strafford" was produced five nights at Covent Garden. It was expected to run three weeks. Browning and his hardened eulogists have always blamed the actors for its withdrawal; but a single reading should convince any one that the play itself made failure inevitable. Yet the attempt at playwriting formed an important second step in Browning's advance toward individual portraiture.

The method first tried had been a serial one, stage succeeding stage in the development of

a person. It had proved too theoretic, vague, and dilatory for a genius so forcibly concrete as Browning. A drama removes these objectionable features. A rounded individual is then at once thrown open to inspection, as he sets forth his own point of view in contrast with that of opposing characters. This would seem to be the very field in which Browning would shine. For half a dozen years he thought so, and spoke of himself as "Robert Browning, writer of plays." Each year saw a new tragedy fall from his rapid pen. Occasionally, as in the first two acts of "Pippa Passes," something vivid and memorable was produced. But in general, Browning's plays lack distinction. Long speeches occur where swift action is needed. The plot is obviously managed, instead of unfolding itself, and the characters, though often strange, are unimpressive. Gradually it became plain, even to Browning himself, that he had not yet found his proper field.

In 1841 a new project was formed. Since managers refused his plays and the public his books, Browning's father arranged with Moxon to issue a play from time to time in pamphlet form. For the series Browning chose the repellent name of "Bells and Pome-

granates." Few copies selling, even at the tempting price of sixpence, Moxon suggested that some poems of a briefer sort be added; and accordingly in the third number, in 1842, appeared the beginning of that wonderful series of "Dramatic Lyrics" in which Browning at last found his sure mode of expression.

The form of these pieces is the monologue, the drama of a single speaker. So peculiarly suited to Browning is the scheme that we are apt to think it his invention. But it has been used in all periods of English poetry. Drayton's "Heroical Epistles" are monologues; so are Pope's "Eloisa to Abelard" and Cowper's "Alexander Selkirk." Tennyson in "St. Simeon Stylites" employed it as early, and afterwards almost as frequently, as Browning himself; in "Maud" giving it greater variety than does Browning in "James Lee's Wife." No, in the monologue Browning merely accepted a not uncommon form as an instrument for painting individual character more accurately than was possible in the sequent study of a single soul or the conversation of a contrasted group. As soon as Browning had created the Dramatic Lyric he abandoned play-writing altogether. The new

method preserved all that was valuable both in it and its lumbering predecessor, attained the full individualism at which Romanticism had long unsuccessfully aimed, introduced a new type into English poetry, and brought before its readers such a company of living men and women as it had not seen since Chaucer died.

For Browning added elements to the monologue which greatly increased its power and adapted it to his special work. They do not appear in all his pieces in equal degree. But about in proportion to their presence and prominence is the importance of the poem. As they become blurred, the monologue loses something of its quality. They are these: (1) His monologue is dramatic, addressed to a listener. (2) It is psychological, disclosing the speaker rather than what is spoken of. (3) It is comprehensive and sums up a complex and habitual character. I will explain briefly each of these points.

Browning's monologue at its best — as in "Andrea del Sarto," "Fra Lippo Lippi," "Clive," "The Laboratory," "In a Year" — is no mere soliloquy, a piece of introspective analysis, as most preceding monologues

had been. His are veritable dramas, involving several persons, to only one of whom do we attend. The mind of him who speaks is everywhere in contact with another mind, which it seeks to bring over to its own point of view. It is as if we stood by a telephone and heard its user speak to a distant friend, and were left to guess at the situation by the fragmentary utterances of only one side. But it is dialogue still. An unseen interlocutor is there, and what we hear has constant reference to his thought. Undoubtedly there are shadings between such completed monologues and soliloquy. In "The Ring and the Book" most of the speakers seek to impress their own view of the case on definite persons. The Pope does not. He is alone and soliloquizes. But his is not like Abt Volger's or Johannes Agricola's, mere soliloquy; for he addresses a plea for mercy or condemnation to God, the Church, public opinion, and argues it out with each. The dramatic advantage of such monologue over the ordinary play lies in the concentration of interest. Where all else is subordinated to a single individual, we more readily identify ourselves with him than if he were but one of a group.

But if the monologue, unlike the soliloquy, has an objective reference to a supposed auditor and outward situation, our interest is not fixed on these. On the contrary, they are but a means for giving to the speaker an importance greater even than he has in the soliloquy, and far greater than in the narrative. They might be compared to a sounding-board, reflecting back in fuller tone the character of the speaker. In judging another, we judge ourselves. Our estimate of a person or event may be incorrect; but if given at an unguarded moment, it is stamped with the impress of him who makes it. This is the profound truth on which Browning's monologue is based. In order to present a person, it is unnecessary to trace successive "incidents in the development of a soul," to watch the man's behavior in society, or to hear him soliloquize. There is a shorter and more illuminating way. A minute of a life as truly contains the character as fifty years. If we would know what a man is, we have only to throw a flashlight on him at a crisis-moment and watch his reaction. That is Browning's new method. The serial scaffolding is torn down, the group dismissed, the narrative suppressed.

Only the dramatic essence remains — a mind reacting on a defined person and situation. The first ten years of Browning's authorship had been spent on the soliloquy, the narrative, and the play; and the first two of these were still to ravage his last twenty years. Even during his years of Mastery the narrative appears as late as 1845 in the beautiful "Italian in England," the soliloquy in "Christmas Eve" of 1850, and something like a play in "In a Balcony" of 1853. But these forms are now subordinate. A shorter and more luminous method has been found.

It should be noticed too that while Browning's flashlight is usually a brief affair, it illuminates not a single mood but a total complex individual. For this it is peculiarly fitted. Tennyson shows us in "Sir Galahad" only chivalric purity; but Browning's Duke, displaying the picture of his last Duchess, is himself a full-length portrait. His dignity, courtesy, cruelty, interest in sculpture, in painting, unite, unconsciously and without exaggeration, to show this cross-section of a Renaissance aristocrat. As Browning's aim, too, is not moral instruction but the dispassionate study of individual character, good

and evil qualities are allowed to intertwine in the same perplexing fashion as in actual life.

Here then is a new and majestic type, and one of deep consequence for the depicting of humanity in English poetry. Of course Wordsworth, Tennyson, and Browning all alike deal with human nature. But Wordsworth deals with its fundamentals, Tennyson with its single moods, and only after long waiting does individual man come to his own. With Browning the creation of character is its own abundant justification. When a poet can truly say, "Here they are, my fifty men and women," we have no right to ask if they are such as will be socially valuable.

Nor must we be disturbed at certain unpleasing characteristics sure to mark the work of such a poet. Laying stress on the individual factor in life rather than the social, he will be disposed to care little for beauty, good taste, and conventional refinement, and will pick out subjects that are peculiar, erratic, even abnormal. In boyhood Browning cared for strange pets, bizarre stories, forced rhymes. They prepared him for his realistic work. His poems introduce us to people who are half insane — Porphyria's Lover, Giraldus,

Childe Roland — or to those morally repulsive, like Fifine, Sludge, and Guido Franceschini. Yet when abnormal persons are shown to be living creatures, our hearts beat in sympathetic response. Nothing human is without interest. But it must be remembered that if these strange beings are to be transferred imaginatively to printed pages, they will use their own language. It would be bad art to offer them the standard language, such as is current among ladies and gentlemen. Not being ladies and gentlemen, they should use the language which accords with their special character. It will not do to be shocked at a diction unheard in poetry before.

On similar grounds some excuse may be found for Browning's notorious obscurities. They spring from fecundity, not feebleness. He can say anything he pleases, and say it with utmost precision. But what pleases him does not always please us. He is a man richly endowed, venturing into strange regions. His crowding thoughts often obtrude on one another, and if we fail to catch his point of view, we do not readily comprehend him. From usual modes of speech, as from usual characters, he is constitutionally averse. In

a letter in my possession sent him from New Zealand, in 1846, by his friend Alfred Domett — the "Waring" of his poem — Domett writes: "As regards your books, I have one first and last request to make or advice to give you. Do for Heaven's sake try to be commonplace. Strain as much for it as weaker poets do against it. And always write for fools. Think of them as your audience, instead of the Sidneys and Marvells and Landors. Ask some one — the dullest, ploddingest acquaintance you have — how he or she (if you can find a woman quite stupid enough) would have expressed your thought, and take his or her arrangement. Will you do this? I fear not. Yet I know that herein lies your truest course." Browning preserved the letter but rejected the advice. As an improvisatore of singular genius, he could learn nothing from criticism. The more the public grumbled, the more firmly he set his teeth and walked his devious way. We may regret that he could not, like Tennyson, draw aid from his enemies. But genius has its limitations and compulsions. He was not writing for others, but merely to create children of his brain, writing for himself. All we can ask of such a man is

that he accept good-naturedly the isolation involved in his work. Browning did not do so, but from time to time bitterly complained that he was not understood. So individual a writer, attempting an altogether new line should have been as indifferent to public opinion as was Wordsworth. Browning was resentful of disparagement and strangely tolerant of organized adulation. Some social feeling is apt to linger about the extremest individualist.

Yet while the creation of individual characters was the special function of Browning, he was not always able to carry it out dispassionately. He too was an individual, possessed of beliefs, moral approvals, and a temperament of his own. Through these he views the characters he constructs, and by these they are liable to be distorted. A great poet is distinguished from a poetic writer by the very fact that he has acquired a fixed point of view from which to survey all that comes before him. Nobody can be impressive without a creed, gospel, or set of habitual ideas with which he confronts the world. What we may call the creed of Browning is, if I rightly understand it, something like this:

To each man there is intrusted a unique character, unlike all others, but incomplete, and with higher and lower possibilities. Which of these possibilities shall prevail is determined by the man's own action at crisis-moments, which in themselves are often small. Sin, for Browning, is therefore, for the most part, injury to one's self rather than to society; and conventional sins are little regarded. The world is for each of us a place of moral training and discipline, and has meaning only as material out of which a person may be formed. A world so constituted implies a God, whose existence cannot be independently proved but is involved in the whole framework of things. His presence is testified to by the Bible and by the consciousness of all men at their highest. This God is a being of power and knowledge, though still like ourselves. In ourselves we see that power and knowledge are merely instrumental to love, which is the highest manifestation of personality. Were God without love, we should be his superiors. Browning does not then conceive God as manifested in law, that is, in scientific fashion; but as the life-principle of love, in an individualistic way. Matter is but a lower form of

spirit, and what look like circumstances are, in reality, only a reflex of the person. God lovingly imparts to us the germs of his own life. Consequently there is an immortality of activity open to each of us, whether in ever fresh existence or in a single continuous existence. But recognition will always be possible. Anything but optimism is stupid and cowardly.

Such in briefest outline is Browning's creed, the body of ideas through which he interprets the world. A noble creed it is, with which in substance I heartily agree. Yet it is not the primary business of an artist to inculcate doctrine. Doctrine, of course, will underlie his work, just as it underlies all life. Our world is bound together by laws or principles, which no true representation of it can disregard. But they are mixed with things, and to detach them for separate statement destroys that concrete unity which it is the artist's office to discover and present. We may say, if we like, that Hamlet teaches the dangers of delay, and Antony those of impulse. But the plays were not constructed for that purpose. Shakspere sought merely to present an interesting section of human life, and did it with such truth that we can draw from it a moral

lesson, as we can from nature itself. The artist is primarily a seer, not a teacher. His characters and situations are no mere means to moral instruction as ends. They are themselves their own end.

Now notwithstanding Browning's extraordinary power of artistic creation, he will not always submit to its laws, but often puts into a poem matter which the subject does not demand. He has some theory to maintain, some lesson to impart, some clever thought has struck him, and he steps forward to offer his own ideas instead of leaving us to view the mind of an imagined character. No doubt it was difficult to be a dispassionate expositor. His beliefs were clear and urgent, and it is much more natural for the Englishman and American to turn to moralizing than to art. The art-sense is feeble among readers to-day. Then too strong influences were unhappily brought to bear, impelling Browning away from his unique office of character-creator to be the deliverer of a moral "message." Read the following passage from one of the letters of Miss Barrett to him just after he had discovered his new method and had begun to apply it in constructive work. On May 26,

1846, immediately preceding their marriage she writes:

"But you — you have the superabundant mental life and individuality which admits of shifting a personality and speaking the truth still. *That* is the highest faculty, the strongest and rarest which exercises itself in art — we are all agreed there is none so great faculty as the dramatic. Several times you have hinted to me that I made you careless for the drama, and it has puzzled me to fancy how it could be, when I understand myself so clearly both the difficulty and the glory of dramatic art. Yet I am conscious of wishing you to take the other crown besides, and after having made your own creatures speak in clear human voices, to speak yourself out of that personality which God made, and with the voice which He tuned into such power and sweetness of speech. I do not think that, with all that music in you, only your own personality should be dumb, nor that having thought so much and deeply on life and its ends, you should not teach what you have learnt in the direct and most impressive way, the mask thrown off, however moist with the breath. And it is not, I believe, by the dramatic me-

dium that poets teach most impressively. I have seemed to observe that! It is too difficult for the common reader to analyze and to discern between the vivid and the earnest. Also he is apt to understand better always when he sees the lips move. Now here is yourself with your wonderful faculty! — it is wondered at and recognized on all sides where there are eyes to see — it is called wonderful and admirable! Yet with an inferior power you might have taken yourself closer to the hearts and lives of men, and made yourself dearer, though being less great. Therefore I do want you to do this with your surpassing power — it will be so easy to you to speak, and so noble when spoken.

"Not that I use n't to fancy I could see you and know you, in a reflex image, in your creations! I used, you remember. How these broken lights and forms look strange and unlike now to me when I stand by the complete idea! Yes, *now* I feel that no one can know you worthily by these poems. Only — I guessed a little. *Now* let us have your own voice speaking of yourself — if the voice may not hurt the speaker — which is my fear."

How exquisitely said, and how poisonous!

Not only too was this poison given by her who was dearest, it came from the outside world as well. That Dr. Furnival who founded the Browning Societies writes thus, in eulogy of Browning's Essay on Shelley:

"The interest in this piece lay in the fact that Browning's utterances here are his, and not those of any one of the so many imaginary persons behind whom he insists on so often hiding himself, and whose necks I for one should continually like to wring, whose bodies I would fain kick out of the way, in order to get face to face with the poet himself, and hear his own voice speaking his own thoughts, man to man, and soul to soul. Straight speaking, straight hitting suit me best."

Yes, they always suit the prosaic Englishman best. In his mind the teacher is regularly set above the artist. In Browning's poetry both are present. It is strange that when in a neighboring art Browning had called attention to this distinction between naturalistic portraiture and endeavor after edification, and given strong preference to the former, he should so frequently in his own art have taken the lower course. In his poem of

"Fra Lippo Lippi" we see the painter covering the walls of his cloister with pictures of unmistakable men and women. Then we hear the Prior's reproach:

> "How? What's here?
> Quite from the mark of painting! Bless us all!
> Faces, arms, legs, and bodies, like the true
> As much as pea and pea! It's devil's game.
> Your business is not to catch men with show,
> With honor to the perishable clay,
> But lift them over it, ignore it all."

To which Fra Lippo replies:

> "Say there's beauty with no soul at all
> (I never saw it, put the case the same).
> If you get simple beauty and naught else,
> You get about the best thing God invents."

What a pity that Browning, abandoning naturalistic representation, for which he had as fine a genius as the Florentine monk, should so frequently have given way to sententious moralizings!

We hardly exaggerate when we say that there are two Brownings: one, the seer, who firmly and disinterestedly pursues his constructive art and, having observed all the subtleties of a character, is satisfied if he can present us a living being who announces no "lesson"; and then there is the teacher, who

cannot escape from himself and is busy with inculcating his own special creed. It is no wonder that as time went on, this facile teacher, emancipated from the restraint of character-building, took on more and more the voice of Browning, became ever more wordy, and recorded more clumsily in rugged rhythms whatever random reflections came into his head. Browning had always loved argument and been amused to see what might be said in behalf of a bad cause. This tendency to sophistry grew upon him. We see it at its best in portions of "The Ring and the Book"; at its worst, in "Fifine" and in the "Parleyings." In Browning's last period little sense of form remains. He often seems to write merely in order to let loose the miscellaneous workings of his mind. Only occasionally is it worth while to read what follows "The Ring and the Book." After that time the teacher, the sophist, the random talker, are chiefly in evidence; the constructive artist has pretty completely disappeared. It may help some of my readers to trace for themselves the two tendencies in Browning if I group together a few illustrative poems. Much of his work admits no such clear classification. The same poem often

contains material of different kinds. But if we select a group to show Browning's power as a constructive artist, it will include such as these: "The Bishop Orders His Tomb," "Andrea del Sarto," "Childe Roland," "The Flight of the Duchess," "In a Gondola," "James Lee's Wife," "The Italian in England," "Confessions," "Hervé Riel," "Life at a Villa," "The Glove," "My Last Duchess." All these poems move us by the imaginative accuracy with which the particular person or situation is presented.

A second group may show how oftentimes, though doctrine is evidently the object of the poem, it still embodies itself in concrete, personal form: "Fra Lippo Lippi," "The Statue and the Bust," "Caliban Upon Setebos," "Saul," "Cleon," "The Strange Epistle of Karshish," "A Grammarian's Funeral." These are all intended to teach something, but they teach in a dramatic way.

And then we go over into the poems of preaching, directly announcing abstract truths. A little group of the strongest would be these: "Abt Vogler," "One Word More," "Old Pictures in Florence," "Any Wife to any Husband," "A Death in the Desert," "Rabbi

Ben Ezra." The last may be regarded as Browning's reply to Omar Khayyám; "A Death in the Desert," his reply to Strauss. Such verse makes interesting reading; but the interest is a moral one. It has little to do with imaginative art.

In "The Ring and the Book," written at the height of his powers and after long experimentation in other fields, Browning has left a complete epitome of his genius. The piece is of colossal proportions, original, terrific, and subtly imaginative beyond any poem of its century. In scope and majesty it takes no presumptuous place beside the glories of our earlier poetry, with "Troilus and Criseyde," "The Faerie Queene," "King Lear," and "Samson Agonistes." The Greeks had a way of choosing some hideous legend, "presenting Thebes or Pelops' line," and by its complete presentation in mellifluous language letting pity and fear effect their own purgation. That is what Browning has done. The squalid circumstances of a Roman murder trial more than two centuries gone by, he has made to live again as a thing of beauty and moral significance, acquainting us with the special temper of its distant time and with the base-

ness and exaltation which belong to humanity at all times. In these twenty thousand lines, put together during nine years, there is room enough for all Browning's characteristics to find their place without damage to the total structure. Here are his argumentation, his searching psychology, his wide-ranging reading and observation, his interest in whatever is peculiar and out of the way, his profound religious sense, his tenderness, brutality, and optimism, his love of mental adventure, occasionally too his mere loquacity. A strange mixture it is, wrought out in what I have called the completed form of his monologue, with appropriate attendant listeners, without soliloquy, narrative, or "message," and finding its sufficient end in a marvellous group of contrasted personalities.

"The Ring and the Book" too announces with startling clearness a fundamental principle of Browning's art to which I have hitherto paid too little attention. It is the principle of "the point of view," and with it his special type of poetry is inherently connected. We know how insistently personal that poetry is. Each man is unique; his nature, nurture, and circumstance differing in some respects

from that of his neighbor. Accordingly the powers by which we apprehend truth will vary, and what is true for one of us will not be true for another. There is no standard set of powers by reference to which absolute truth may be known. Reality is always relative. Each of us brings with him a point of view, from which he cannot escape. The doctrine of the point of view accordingly underlies all that Browning writes. Something personal is always added to reality as a formative factor whenever we approach a fact. In "The Ring and the Book" what we call the same story is told by nine different people, and to the last we do not know — nor very much care — what the facts in themselves may really be. We only know how they look from these several points of view. The wise man then will fix his attention rather on the beholder than on the things alleged to be beheld. "There's nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so," Hamlet says. To comprehend a human soul, Browning has told us, is the one thing in the world deserving study. The great service of the poets lies in their teaching us to look at the world from other points of view than our own.

Now "The Ring and the Book" is a veritable school for this sort of instruction, and that its teachings may impress us the more, they are conveyed in triadic form. Three groups, with three contrasted members in each, report to us what they know, and therefore what they are. A ghastly murder occurred at Rome in 1679. Giuseppe Caponsacchi, a priest, ran away from Arezzo to Rome with Pompilia, the girl-wife of Guido Franceschini, a brutal and impoverished noble. Guido pursued the fugitives and subsequently killed Pompilia and her reputed parents, he himself being finally executed. Each of these three chief actors in the affair tells his story, no two alike. But the people of Rome are likewise interested, one part of them taking the wife's side, one the husband's; and besides these, those who, putting away all sentiment, see right on each side and pride themselves on judging all by pure intellect. Each one of this group not involved in the affair lets us learn how his mind has been affected. Then appears the legal group, the advocate of each party with the Pope, the judge of all. At the very last, and after Guido is condemned and is about to pass from his prison to go to the scaf-

fold, he is allowed to speak once more, and then discloses a side of himself and his story unlike what was heard before.

Here then a story is told ten times without ever failing in interest. This is because by Browning's "new method" the event is transfused through personalities which it illuminates in every part. Where else outside Shakspere has individual experience been painted on such a scale? The long struggle of Romanticism, moving in the direction of Browning's new type and new method, culminates in this masterpiece and shows itself capable of prodigious effects. No wonder the coming of something so huge created disturbance in the public mind. People must be either violently repelled or ardently attracted by this unflinching poet of the personal life. We may say that Tennyson and Browning summarize the imaginative life of their century. Browning shows the beginning of that Naturalism which henceforth, for good or ill, was to flood our poetry. Tennyson sings regretfully the shimmering charm, the ideal beauty, the refinement, the wistfulness, which were soon to pass away.

SUGGESTIONS FOR READING

The two volumes of "Selections" from Browning, drawn up by himself (Macmillan), seems to me judicious, if somewhat too full. The classified lists of his more notable poems, already given in the text, sufficiently indicate my preferences and need not be repeated here. Any one undertaking "The Ring and the Book" for the first time should read Browning's Introduction, especially the last half, and either the speech of Caponsacchi or of Pompilia.

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